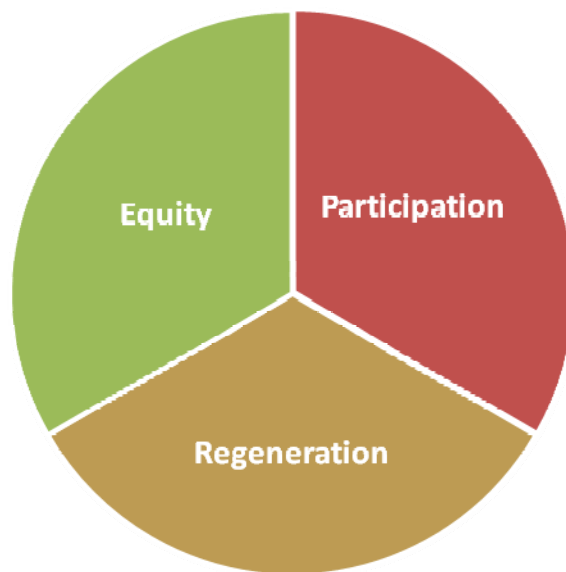


# Supporting Resident Led Regeneration in Rhondda Cynon Taff



## A participatory report for discussion and action

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# Supporting Resident-Led Regeneration in Rhondda Cynon Taff

## A Participatory Report for Discussion and Action

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# Summary

## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to offer a focus for discussion of inclusive community participation in the Communities First (CF) programme in Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT). This is particularly important at this time, as funding for the Communities First Participation and Involvement Team (PAIT) in RCT will end in March 2009. The important issue now is to consider the lessons learned from this project and ensure that the momentum generated from the groundbreaking work of this team be sustained and developed.

This report will argue that inclusive participation is vital for successful and sustainable community regeneration. It will outline the current policy and legislative context, identify good practice, identify some of the main barriers and make a number of proposals for discussion and action.

## Policy and Legislative Context

**Community participation** is considered central to the successful implementation of the anti-poverty and social inclusion agendas. Moreover, there are also increasing requirements to involve people in local communities in both policy and practice.

The importance of community participation to successful regeneration is now generally accepted and there is substantial evidence to support this claim.

There is also now an increasing awareness among policy makers of the importance of consultation and participation for effective community regeneration and service delivery and the need to support this process with training, funding support, additional time and opportunities for feedback.

Community participation can release the skills, talents and energies of many people to help improve local communities and public services. It will also mean that public money is invested more effectively as services are more likely to be relevant and useful to residents and users.

**The equality agenda** has emerged in recent times as a key policy area within both the Welsh Assembly Government and in local authorities.

The equality agenda is not simply an issue about the inclusion of minority groups but is important for everyone and directly or indirectly affects the whole population.

The evidence from a number of recent studies and consultations reveal that the engagement of excluded groups in the Community First programme in Wales has been limited and variable. The issues are:

- Some excluded groups such as disabled people, gay, lesbian and bisexual people, women and faith groups received little or no funding to support their engagement
- Projects are not reaching out to the most excluded groups.

## Good practice

Over the past decade, there has been significant progress in promoting the concepts of consultation and participation within RCT and in particular, the inclusion of the voices of children and young people.

The Communities First Participation and Involvement Team supported a number of initiatives to develop participative and inclusive processes in the consultation, planning and implementation of the programme.

There have been no designated workers for disability, sexuality, religion / belief and gender in Communities First in RCT. However, there are good examples of positive and progressive work with excluded groups within the voluntary sector.

## Barriers

People who experience poverty and exclusion often face a range of barriers to their participation in anti-poverty and regeneration initiatives. A number of barriers emerged from discussions with participants in RCT:

- **A culture of strong local identities** can be both a strength and a weakness in terms of participation
- **Anti-poverty and inequality as two separate agendas** rather than being linked together
- **The lack of a common understanding of participation** - do we see participation as a strategy for regeneration or as worthy objective in itself?
- **Negative association of anti-poverty initiatives** - people may not want to associate themselves with the identity of being 'poor' or being a member of an 'excluded group'
- **Shortage of professional workers** with participatory and equality knowledge and skills
- **Technical barriers** relate to not having access to methods of engagement that can go beyond the 'usual suspects'

- **Personal and practical** barriers such as lack of childcare, suitable transport, and problems of physical access to buildings
- **Organisational** barriers refer to traditional forms of collective structures such as public meetings and partnership boards that can often exclude and hinder wider and inclusive participation
- **Lack of collective autonomous voices** to influence political decision-making.

## Key Messages

- The need to build acceptance of the idea that it is the people who live in RCT, acting both individually and collectively, who can (with the appropriate support) create the momentum to improve *their* own lives and *their* communities
- The need to develop a more inclusive understanding of the term 'local residents'

## An Agenda for Discussion and Action

The report brings together a number of proposals for a framework of support and as a basis for discussion and action among key stakeholders. These include:

- **Awareness**

The need to build acceptance of the idea of the need to build in participation at community and agency level

- **Mainstreaming**

To seek to mainstream ideas associated with participation and equality within Community First and regeneration policies and programmes

- **A 'joined up' approach**

We need a clear consensus about what it is we are trying to achieve in relation to participation and clear linkages between community consultations and policy making

- **Community Participation and Equality Strategies**

To develop a Participation Strategy for community regeneration with clear links to a Local Authority led Single Equality Plan

- **More area and county wide collaboration**

There is a need for more collaboration between groups in different localities and more area and cross-county work

- **A Package of Support**

- Direct assistance to support people's (self and collective) development and organisation
- Enabling workers with the necessary skills, knowledge and personal qualities
- Resources, support and time to enable and support more participatory processes in community regeneration
- Education, training and expertise
- Learning and sharing the lessons from both successes and failures

- **To acknowledge that participation does not come cheap**

- The necessary resources need to be available to support people's engagement in community regeneration

# 1.0 Introduction

## The purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to offer a focus for discussion of inclusive community participation in the Communities First (CF) programme in Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT). This report will:

- Argue that inclusive participation is vital for successful community regeneration in RCT CF areas
- Outline the current policy and legislative context for participation and equality
- Outline examples of good practice (both within and outside CF)
- Identify some of the main barriers to participation and equality
- Propose (as a basis of discussion and action) a supportive framework for promoting inclusive community participation in CF areas in RCT.

## Methodology

The findings of this report are based on individual and group discussions with key practitioners and stakeholders in the field during the period from December 2008 until March 2009. Based on these discussions, a draft report was produced and circulated for comments to the Consultation Group (see Acknowledgements). A final report was then be produced for circulation to a wider audience of stakeholders.

This report is intended to bring some clarity to a complex area of community regeneration and provide a basis for discussion and action among key stakeholders.

## Terms

The language of participation and equality throws up a wide range of terms. These terms can mean different things to different people. For the purpose of this report, they will be defined as follows:

### Consultation

Consultation means asking people's opinion about a proposed initiative, policy or service. It is an exercise that clearly states the level of participation involved (what can and cannot be changed). Feedback is collated by those who initiate the consultation and the proposed initiative is amended accordingly.

### Participation

Participation is different to consultation. In the context of community development it is mainly about a process, which seeks to *enable and support* residents/users to get involved in **independent voluntary/community initiatives** and to identify their

concerns and priorities. This process is often supported by workers, grants and resources.

### **Equality**

Equality is about making sure people are treated fairly and justly. Equality is not about treating everyone in the same way. It recognises that people's needs can be met in different ways. It is also concerned with ensuring compliance with the law in relation to the key areas of race, gender, disability, age, religion or belief and sexuality.

### **Diversity**

Diversity is essentially about the recognition of the difference between people, groups of people and communities (Clements & Jones, 2003: 52).

### **Inclusion**

Inclusion is about the participation of those who tend to benefit least from economic and social development and who are excluded from the decision-making process.

### **Excluded groups**

This term refers to groups in specific contexts who face barriers to their inclusion within society. For example, it can refer to particular groups of people in the following categories:

- Children
- Women
- Men
- Black and minority ethnic communities
- Gypsies/Travellers
- Asylum seekers
- Refugees
- Disabled people (and I am using here an inclusive definition here to encompass people with physical and sensory impairments, older disabled people, mental health service users/survivors, people with learning difficulties and so on)
- People with specific health issues
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) groups
- Young people and Older people
- Those whose live in specific areas (such as on social housing estates)
- Religious/Faith groups
- Those on Low incomes
- People with basic skills needs

## 2.0 Background

The Welsh Assembly government set up the Communities First programme in 2002. 100 of the poorest wards were identified using the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. In addition, a number of local areas within wards were identified together with ten projects for communities of interest. In RCT, 22 local areas were selected for intervention, eleven directly supported by the Council and eleven hosted by community and voluntary organisations. The areas are Abercwmboi, Cwmaman, Bryncynon, Cwm Clydach, Cymmer, Gilfach Goch, Glyncoch, Llwynypia, Maerdy, Mountain Ash West, Tri Yn Un (Penrhiwceiber, Miskin and Perthcelyn) Penygraig, Penywaun, Rhydyfelin Central/Llan, Trealaw, Treherbert, Tonyrefail West, Penrhys, Pontygwaith, Tylorstown and Ynyshir.

In addition, a Communities First Participation and Involvement Team was established which comprised:

- A Communities First Participation Support Officer based at Interlink
- An Older Peoples Participation Officer based at Age Morgannwg
- A Welsh Language Participation Officer based at Menter Iaith
- An Ethnic minority Participation Officer based at the Valleys Regional Equality Council

The next phase of Communities Next requires a shift of focus and resources towards outcomes and achievements (particularly in relation to child poverty and income generation). As such, funding for the Communities First Participation and Involvement Team in RCT will end in March 2009. Limited forms of information, training and advice will continue to be provided during the next phase of the programme by Empower Cymru and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action. At this stage, it is important to acknowledge some key pieces of work from the Participation and Involvement Team and the CF Support Network have played in promoting the value of community participation across the CF programme in RCT. This team has broken new ground and initiated good practice for the inclusion of black and minority ethnic people, older people, and welsh learners. The important issue now is to consider the lessons learned and ensure that the momentum generated from some of the excellent work of this team be sustained and developed. However, there are also lessons to be learnt from areas of the programme that have been less successful.

## 3.0 Policy and Legislative Context

Through its policies and strategies, the Assembly Government has adopted a citizen based approach to service delivery. Moreover, there are also increasing requirements to involve people in local 'communities' in both policy and practice. This view is reflected in all Assembly policies and strategies such as Making the Connections: Delivering Better Services in Wales (WAG, 2004) and in the National Tenant Participation Strategy (WAG, 2007a). There are also a number of local policy initiatives, which relate to community participation and require consultation with residents across RCT. These include:

**RCT Community Strategy (2009)** sets out the vision for RCT from 2009 to 2020. This strategy incorporates a range of issues and actions aimed at improving the economic, social and environmental well being of their areas.

**RCT Health Social Care & Wellbeing Strategy (2008-2011)**

This strategy is concerned with residents' physical and mental health with living, working and recreational conditions, the quality of the environment, social and cultural factors and availability and access to services and facilities.

**RCT Children and Young People's Plan (2008-2011)**

The vision of the Children's and Young People's Plan is "that children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taff will be healthy, well educated, confident and creative individuals contributing to and living safely within their sustainable communities."

### Participation and Communities First

Community participation is considered central to the successful implementation of the anti-poverty agenda. For instance, from the outset, an essential element of the Communities First programme was to "include everyone (of all ages) within the community in the process" (WAG, 2000, 2.1.). There is also now an increasing awareness among policy makers of the importance of consultation and participation for effective regeneration and service delivery and the need to support this process with training, funding support, additional time and opportunities for feedback.

At one level it is possible to see the need to move to a more outcome based approach particularly in the final phase of the Communities First programme. At the same time, the participatory vision to "enable people to contribute to the regeneration of their communities in practical ways" (WAG, 2008a, 4.1.1) remains the core philosophy. This approach fits with current thinking across the UK. The importance of community participation to successful regeneration is now generally accepted and there is substantial evidence to support this (Joseph Rowntree Foundation). Most studies have found that it is people, acting both individually and collectively (and with appropriate support from external agencies), that can create the necessary momentum to improve their own lives and living environments. From this perspective, the residents of Communities First areas in Rhondda Cynon Taff

are considered central to the process of change. *It is **their** participation in a process of their making that creates the necessary conditions for the changes **they** want to bring about.* Community participation can release the skills, talents and energies of many people to help improve local communities and public services. It will also mean that public money is invested more effectively as services are more likely to be relevant and useful to residents and users.

## **The Equality Agenda**

Community participation is also closely tied to the government's equality agenda and particularly in making the links between anti-poverty work and inequality. In recent times, the equality agenda has emerged as a key policy area from the UK government, the Welsh Assembly and from local authorities. This agenda underpins the public sector approach to modernisation and the improvement of public services. Integral to this thinking is the idea that the equality agenda is not simply an issue about the inclusion of minority groups but is important for everyone and directly or indirectly affects the whole population. There are a number of legislative and government initiatives that have implications for community participation. The main ones are as follows:

### **The Assembly's Statutory duty**

The Welsh Assembly Government has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity in all aspects of Welsh life regardless of age, disability, gender, language, race, religion and belief or sexual orientation. It also has specific duties in respect of the Welsh language. This means that consideration of all equality related issues should be embedded into all aspects of the work of the Welsh Assembly Government and the bodies it funds.

### **Public Sector duties**

Public bodies that are involved in partnership work are responsible for meeting the public sector duties. The Gender Equality Duty and the Race Equality Duty require consultation with relevant stakeholders and the Disability Equality Duty requires involvement of disabled people.

**The proposed Single Equality Scheme** will distil nine pieces of legislation into a Single Equality Act. This will replace the three existing, separate duties and create a single new Equality Duty on public bodies to tackle discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and encourage good community relations. The new duty will cover race, disability and gender, as now, but also include age, sexual orientation, gender reassignment and religion or belief.

### **The All Wales Community Cohesion Strategy (WAG, 2009)**

The vision of the Community Cohesion Strategy is 'To strengthen all our communities within Wales and encourage community integration for all individuals regardless of faith, race, age or background.'

## **Equalities and Communities First**

The relationship between CF and equality is clearly expressed in the Communities Next document, which stated that,

Equality should not be an afterthought tagged on to the end of Partnership's activities. The aims, policies and strategies of every Community First Partnership should begin with equality in mind (WAG, 2008a 4.11.2).

This equality agenda is also concerned with the issue of difference within communities and the need to promote "a culture in which diversity is valued and equality of opportunity is a reality" (1.3). For instance, Community First partnerships are expected to include "a broad range of representation from people living in the Communities First area (3,7) (WAG, 2007b).

Equality work is a relatively new area of work in RCT. Some excluded groups such as disabled people, gay, lesbian and bisexual people, women and faith groups received little or no funding to support their engagement with the Communities First programme. Certainly, the evidence from a number of studies and consultations reveal that the engagement of excluded groups in the overall programme has been limited and variable. For instance, the Interim Evaluation stated that projects "are not reaching the more disadvantaged groups in the communities" (WAG, 2006, p.111). The evaluation concluded that, "We have not come across much evidence of the involvement of physically or mentally disabled people on partnerships as representatives" (p.50)

A study by Oxfam (2005) found that young people, women with caring responsibilities and people from black and minority ethnic groups were poorly represented on Local Partnership Groups (Anti- Poverty Network Cymru 2006). An analysis of the Communities Next consultation stated that: "The greatest response given to questions around Communities of Interest was non-response because of lack of involvement with these communities " (WAG, 2008). And again in relation to consultation, a report conducted by the Commission for Racial Equality and which examined race and regeneration found that,

. . . most of the organisations involved in regeneration activity did not have a sufficiently rigorous approach to consultation and were not reaching all the different groups likely to be affected by the schemes (Commission for Race Equality, 2007).

The lack of engagement of excluded groups in the CF programme may reflect a deeper problem and particularly the traditional split between anti-poverty and equalities work. For example, disabled people are still largely seen as a 'social services' and 'welfare' issue rather than being an 'equality' issue or indeed being included in debates around 'regeneration'.

## 4.0 Good Practice

Over the past decade, there has been significant progress in promoting the concepts of consultation and participation within RCT. In particular, the development of the voices of children and young people through the work of organisations such as Fframwaith. An analysis of the CF action plans for 2008/9 show that 32% of the projects (127 out of a total of 398) were concerned with children and young people. This reflects important progress for groups that have been traditionally excluded from development and regeneration initiatives.

The Communities First Participation Officers supported a number of initiatives to develop participative and inclusive processes in the consultation, planning and implementation of the programme. One of the most important initiatives was the Skills for Regeneration project which enabled local volunteers/activists to train in regeneration and progress to employment. The Team initiated and supported a wide range of positive activities, these have been listed under their areas of responsibility.

### **Older people**

- Accessible growing
- Age awareness training
- Community Safety work
- Dance projects and computer fitness games such as WiiSports
- Food demonstration sessions and courses including nutrition and budgeting
- Healthy Living and Healthy Eating groups
- Supporting older peoples groups and forums through capacity building, fundraising and research
- Intergenerational projects with schools and colleges

### **Welsh learners**

- Welsh language classes
- Work with children and young people
- Menter Iaith has worked with many groups in Communities First areas to develop their potential and to assist local Partnerships to develop their services bilingually.

### **Black and minority ethnic people**

- Casework around harassment- linking individuals with CF partnerships and supporting them to access mainstream services
- Community Watch
- Cooking demonstrations
- Drama groups
- Digital stories
- Education business partnership
- Equality Training
- Hate crime
- Literacy support
- Multicultural Festivals
- Schools Calendar project

- Work in schools on equality and diversity
- Work in schools to support students experiencing bullying
- Work on St David's Day
- Work with Playschemes
- Young Achievers award
- Work with Valleys Women's Ethnic Minority group (VWEMS). (The VWEMS run social events, confidence building and training for BME women in the South Wales Valleys)
- Digital story work with Penrhys Communities First supporting international exchange Students.

### **Other strands**

There have been no designated workers for disability, sexuality, religion/belief and gender in Communities First in RCT. However, there are good examples of positive and progressive work with these groups within the voluntary sector and initiated by local and national organisations. Some recent examples are listed below:

### **Lesbian Gay and Bisexual People**

I did not discover any work with LGB people within the Communities First Programme in RCT. However, the programme could play a useful role in supporting a new initiative in the Rhondda. A Forum for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people is being formed based on the successful group in Merthyr Tydfil. The Merthyr group was formed to provide peer support and a forum for communication between LGB people, the local Police and other service providers. The aims of the Merthyr project was to develop the confidence of local LGB people to meet together, establish their own group and raise awareness of the issues for LGB people with local service providers.

The need for a similar network/forum in RCT has developed as a result of incidents of prejudice, discrimination and hatred against Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people who live in the area. The forum will seek to provide a safe environment for people to meet and also to offer opportunities to make contact with a wide range of agencies who can offer support. This group is supported by a number of organisations. These include Rhondda Housing Association and its Tenants Forum, the South Wales Police and Stonewall Cymru. Chris Bryant, MP for the Rhondda, also supports the formation of the group.

Stonewall Cymru also promotes other initiatives on an all Wales basis such as Awareness Training and the Education Champions Programme which provides support and guidance to local authorities in tackling homophobia and homophobic bullying in schools.

### **Faith groups**

There is a long and proud tradition of faith involvement in RCT. Many Faith communities and individual members already make a positive and significant contribution to local development and regeneration. A study conducted in 2006 estimated that there were 172 Faith communities in RCT with 1360 volunteers. Faith organisations offer a wide range of cultural, educational, welfare and community services for children, young people and adults across the county. The majority of these congregations are Christian churches. However, in recent times, there is some evidence of Non-Christian faith groups emerging. Some CF

programmes have formal links with Faith communities and Interlink has always provided a range of support such as capacity building and funding guidance. (For more detailed information on the extensive work of Faith groups see Rev David Brown's 2008 & WAG (2008c).

## **Disabled people**

Some Community First partnerships have been involved with improving mental health awareness and with the provision of training in Sign Language. However, there are no specific initiatives in relation to disability and regeneration that came to light during research for this report. Some insights into taking forward the participation of disabled people in development and regeneration are offered by the fields of disability and social care, where a strong tradition of 'user involvement' has developed. These have included the emergence of confident movements of disabled people and other social care service users, based on assertive self-run organizations. These groups have been influenced by the Social Model of Disability and its emphasis on participation, inclusion and securing people's citizenship rights.

There are also some very good local projects that are breaking new ground in terms of user control and self-advocacy. These include:

- **The Dewis Centre for Independent Living** in Pontypridd whose aim it is to support disabled people take more control of their community care needs.
- **Rhondda Cynon Taff People First** promotes self-advocacy for people with learning disabilities.
- Interlink schemes such as the **Mental Health Service User Involvement Project**
- The **Routes to Recovery project** and the **Expert Patient Programme**, which builds the confidence, knowledge and skills of disabled people.
- The **Taff Ely Access Group**. This group is run by disabled people themselves and seeks the removal of barriers which prevent disabled people from having equal access to facilities and services.

## **Women and Men**

Gender is often overlooked in regeneration work, despite its considerable importance. Men and women experience poverty and exclusion in different ways and can have different priorities for community regeneration. A positive development in recent times is that many of the activists and workers in the CF areas are women. Partnerships have also been concerned with providing childcare to facilitate women's involvement in community activities, training and employment.

Welsh Women's Aid (WWA) offer vital services to women and children experiencing domestic abuse and campaign for improvements in public policy and government legislation. There are groups in both the Rhondda and Cynon valleys. Clearly, there is potential for work around domestic violence with CF areas and indeed work with men (particularly young men) around a whole range of issues.

## 5.0 Barriers

People who experience poverty and exclusion often face a range of barriers to their participation in anti-poverty and regeneration initiatives. These can be physical, cultural, linguistic, attitudinal, financial and social. A number of barriers emerged from discussions with participants in RCT.

### **A culture of strong local identities**

The history and physical geography of the Valleys has fostered and sustained strong local identities. This can be both a strength and a weakness in terms of participation. Most people in the Valleys identify strongly with 'place', which has contributed to the emergence of localised community regeneration projects. However, strong local identities can sometimes stifle the emergence of new identities. For instance, lesbian gay/bisexual people and mental health users may not want to identify themselves solely in terms of 'place' and may look outside the locality for a shared sense of identity and a network of support. Also, issues such as racism can be overlooked based on perceptions that there is no sizeable group of black and minority ethnic people in the Valleys.

The creation of joint work across localities can also be hindered by isolation and poor transport links. Strong local identities can also help to sustain a strong competitive culture between villages and estates. This can sometimes hinder work on wider issues such as equality, education, health, transport, employment and the environment. For example, suitable transport is an important issue for older and disabled people across the Valleys and requires a co-ordinated response.

### **Anti-poverty and inequality as two separate agendas**

The anti-poverty agenda has tended to focus on localities such as Communities First. The equality agenda has had a more specific remit and has tended to be associated with specific excluded groups. For example, while disabled people have been at the forefront of developing effective schemes for user involvement, particularly in health and social care, yet they have in effect been largely marginalised in both discussions and developments relating to community regeneration.

### **Lack of a common understanding of participation**

There can often be confusion about what we are trying to achieve in relation to participation. Do we see it as a strategy to achieve specific regeneration outcomes or as a worthwhile goal in itself such as bringing about individual and/or group empowerment. The barrier here is that we may have different understandings of what we mean and how it contributes to community regeneration. For local residents, it is crucial that they get a sense that something tangible or worthwhile will come out of their involvement. For example, learning new skills for employment or acquiring the confidence to get involved in community activities.

### **Negative association of anti-poverty initiatives**

Anti-poverty and exclusion initiatives can often have a negative identity. People may not want to associate themselves with the identity of being 'poor' or being a member of an 'excluded group'. Thus poverty and exclusion often provide a less than helpful basis for involving people and forming groups.

## **Professional**

Community and youth workers are increasingly acquiring participatory and equality knowledge and skills. However, this area is becoming very specialised and there is still a shortage of workers with a background in these areas of work.

## **Technical**

This relates to reaching and accessing certain groups of users. Traditional approaches to consultation such as surveys open days and public meetings have many limitations for seeking to engage excluded groups. If we only use these methods, we can end up listening to the voices of the usual suspects and the most confident groups. The danger is that we can only hear **one community perspective** when the reality is often the existence of a number of smaller communities who may want different things. For example, community consultations that do not reach out to engage with minority voices within the locality.

## **Personal and Practical**

There are a number of personal and practical issues that limit people's participation such as:

- Lack of confidence and fear of engagement with others
- Lack of information
- Lack of suitable transport to attend meetings
- Lack of childcare
- Problems of physical access to venues
- Lack of interpreting services
- Literacy needs of some residents from having had little or inappropriate formal education.
- The difficulties of sustaining involvement due to physical and mental distress
- Difficulties in getting small pots of money for support costs
- Lack of accessible formats and technological support for groups such as disabled people.

## **Organisational Structures**

Traditional structures of organisation such as formal public meetings and Partnership Boards can sometimes hinder involvement. These formats can exclude people who are unfamiliar with meetings and who lack confidence and skills. They can find it a frightening, bewildering and disempowering experience. The result is that the dominant voices within the locality continue to shape the agendas and the discussion.

## **Lack of collective autonomous voices**

The lack of resident and user-led groups and organisations in RCT concerned with influencing political decision-making. For instance, in recent times, there has been a significant shift away from campaigning and lobbying work towards service delivery.

## 6.0 An Agenda for discussion and action

There are two key messages from this report. **Firstly, that the participation of residents is central to improving *their* lives and *their* communities within RCT.** While 'regeneration projects', 'strategic partnerships', money and community managers are important elements in successful development and regeneration, the participation of residents is the crucial factor. This is particularly important as we enter the final phase of Communities First when participants will be expected to prepare projects for handover to the community.

**The second key message is the need to develop an inclusive understanding of the term 'local residents'.** A key issue to emerge is that excluded groups in RCT have a very marginal role in 'regeneration or development' programmes and projects. The important question now is how notions of 'community regeneration' and 'community development' can include the concerns and needs of excluded individuals and groups.

Taking together the changing policy context, the good practice achieved and the barriers identified, key partners can identify the essential elements for a framework of support for participatory and equality work as follows:.

### **The need to build acceptance of the idea**

We need to build acceptance of the idea that residents are central to improving *their own* lives and communities in RCT. A new organisation or network may also be needed to promote the idea and benefits of inclusive participation at community and agency levels. Such an organisation or network could seek to propose alternative models of leadership, organisation and practice to facilitate ownership, sustainability and cross-Valleys work.

### **Mainstreaming**

A co-ordinated strategic approach from the Assembly is needed to mainstream ideas associated with participation and equality within Community First policies and programmes. As part of this, it is important that funding be mainstreamed to support cross-Valleys work around equalities. For example, rather than giving each partnership a sum of £5,000 for equality and diversity work, it might be more productive to allocate this funding to offer a co-ordinated approach across the partnerships.

### **A more 'joined up' approach**

We need a clear consensus about what it is we are trying to achieve in relation to participation. Crucially, how can it contribute to promoting sustainability and addressing issues such as child poverty. For this purpose, it would be helpful to have clear coherent links and accountability between Assembly and local authority policies and strategies.

Mechanisms also need to be established between Assembly departments and the voluntary/community sectors to ensure good practice gets fed into Assembly

strategies particularly in areas such as community planning, social inclusion, the social economy and child poverty. As part of this, there needs to be clear linkages between community consultations and policy making to overcome widespread fatigue and scepticism about Assembly initiatives that are perceived to offer no clear visible outcomes. There also needs to be a more research based approach to conducting consultations and the necessary resources provided for this purpose.

### **A Local Authority-Led Participation and Equality Strategy**

The local authority is the key player in terms of community planning, leadership and management. It might be useful to consider a coherent Participation Strategy for community regeneration in line with what is now being proposed within Community and Children's Services (Service User and Carer Participation Strategy). Inclusive participation also needs to be an important part of the Authorities Single Equality Scheme. This would work towards developing a vision, principles and an action plan which would also embrace the requirements of equality legislation and standards.

### **More area and county wide collaboration**

There is a need for more area and cross county work that can argue for and access resources. Local 'regeneration' initiatives that emerge from the motivations and concerns of local people have many strengths and can make a real difference to communities. However, while saying this, isolated and often under resourced projects have many limitations when it comes to addressing some of the major problems that impact on the locality. Therefore, more collaboration is needed between different 'localities' to address area and county issues, to share facilities, good practice and training. The need for more collaboration also applies to organisations concerned with equality issues. It is important that these organisations strive to work together across the strands and pursue common issues. Organisations will also need extra support and resources to work in this way.

### **A Package of Support**

As noted above, a key argument of this report is that people's capacity is the primary element of effective participation. If we accept this principle, then residents will need support from external agencies. The purpose of which would be to promote personal development and strengthen the ability of community based organisations to build their structures and systems to facilitate participation and equality. This support could comprise a number of elements. For example,

- **Direct assistance to support people's (self and collective) organisation**

A pool of workers working across the local authority area with particular expertise in relation to participation and equality. Key objectives would be to support individual development and also encourage inclusive resident led organisations within localities. In addition, to support existing equality groups across **all** the strands by supporting the emergence of new identities, user led groups and networks within and across the local authority area. This pool, based centrally, would provide both generalist and specialist expertise. For example this may include help with personal development, consultations or events, methods for engagement, mapping exercises, aspects of training, consultancy, organisational development, mentoring and so on. In addition, specific skills and knowledge could be brought in for work with specific groups (for example, with disabled people, black and minority ethnic people, young people and so on)

- **Enabling workers with the necessary skills, knowledge and personal qualities**

If residents are to be asked to take more control and responsibility for the problems and solutions within localities, then the nature of the support required from external workers is crucial. A wide range of workers are needed to support the process of regeneration *but not to lead it*. Community managers are vital to the success of community regeneration projects and have an important role in developing participatory and equitable forms of organisation. In terms of facilitating the participatory agenda, most evidence would suggest that people want *'enablers'* rather than *'doers'*. In other words, workers who will *'help'* but who will not *'take over'* thus decreasing the likelihood of dependency relations and promoting notions of autonomy and sustainability. The important questions workers need to ask people in communities are: What do *you* want to achieve? How can we as workers help to bring that about? What level of support will *you* need?

- **User-Friendly Structures**

It might also be more helpful to explore more participatory and *'user friendly'* structures and processes for participation and partnership work. Participatory schemes need to consider what will engage residents who are used to doing things in a range of different ways. For example, thematic groups can facilitate the participation of residents more than traditional forms of representation such as formal meetings.

- **Resources, support and time**

Most participants to this study emphasised that efforts to initiate meaningful participation take time and patience and can put great demands on all those who are involved. A number of practical forms of incentives and support were identified for this purpose, these include:

- Offering incentives to residents for their time and work. For example, structured and supported personal development plans, volunteering opportunities, payments to groups, time credits, routes to training/education and employment.
- Access to information technology
- Small pots of money for support costs

- **Education, Training and expertise**

Training should not be seen as the panacea for all problems in poor areas. One of the issues to emerge in discussion is that existing CF workers have to operate within very difficult and stressful environments with high expectations at Assembly, local authority and community level. There has already been a high turnover of staff across the Communities First area. We need to ask whether CF staff need to be experts in every area of policy particularly if we accept that their primary roles are about empowering communities and working towards sustainability. The gap in existing knowledge and skills could be best dealt with by **bringing in appropriate outside expertise**.

More attention could be given to **education and training provision for the wider community**. For example, local partnership members, voluntary management committee members, volunteers and the wider community. A first

step here would be to develop a Community Learning Plan that included links between the learning needs of individuals and groups with wider community regeneration. This could include:

- Work to develop personal confidence and skills for active citizenship, education, training and employment
- To enable local activists/volunteers to avail of voluntary opportunities in community regeneration projects
- Training for advocacy, lobbying, campaigning and helping people to become involved in the political process at both local and national levels
- To raise levels of awareness of wider topics and issues which affect the locality. A key objective here is to seek to widen perspectives, raise aspirations and
- To change attitudes and behaviours is seen to be particularly important in relation to work with young people and in challenging issues such as racism, sexism and homophobia.

In terms of equality, staff might welcome the opportunity of **generalist equality training** so they have the opportunity to see how it applies to their areas of work and their roles. Specific expertise in relation to each of the equality strands could be 'bought in' as and when needed.

- **Building evaluation into the programme so that lessons can be learned and shared**

It is important that we learn from our successes and our mistakes. To identify what has worked well (and not so well) in relation to participation and that we provide opportunities to share this experience. This could be achieved in a number of ways:

- To evaluate a selection of existing projects and identify the key lessons learned
- To activate wider social networks and opportunities through the organisation of joint participatory/equality events. These can provide opportunities to share experiences and identify possibilities for joint working
- To explore how good practice with children and young people, health and social care service users and housing tenants can inform participatory work on community regeneration
- To identify good practice in equality work. For example, demonstrating how the local community and agencies can offer support to individuals or families experiencing racial harassment.

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