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ABSTRACT

Rural poverty and wide-ranging environmental concerns are some of the problems driving a growing public debate on rural issues across the United Kingdom. This briefing paper assesses the contribution that a community development approach can make to these issues. Rural areas have a long history of collective action, from farm families helping each other at harvest time to communal efforts to provide village services, schools, carnivals, and drama events. Recent decades have seen increasing outside efforts to influence policies, decisions, and trends that threaten local areas, such as school closings, environmental issues, and large new housing developments. The role and challenge of community development is to reinforce local collective action where it is already occurring, and encourage more communities to acquire the confidence and skills to take collective action. Chapters set the rural context; identify broad trends related to rural population, changing employment, declining services, the market economy, and rural-urban conflicts about the environment; provide examples of effective community work around village services, schools, community centers, housing, economic development, village appraisals, and environmental action; and identify the main agencies and programs in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The booklet concludes by recommending consolidation of the community work occupation; promotion of a community approach; appreciation of the Europe-wide perspective; a reappraisal of values; development of political responsibility and citizenship; and adoption of a more strategic approach. Contains 19 references and 29 organizational contacts in the United Kingdom and Europe. (TD)

Community Development and Rural Issues

David Francis and Paul Henderson

ACRE

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION PUBLICATIONS

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT No. 6 BRIEFING PAPER

Community Development and Rural Issues

David Francis and Paul Henderson

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Contents

Foreword

This is the sixth booklet in this series of briefing papers. The purpose of the series is to introduce and explain community development and its uses in a number of social, economic and recreational settings. The first booklet, *Signposts to Community Development* by Marilyn Taylor sets out succinctly the methods and values of community development, and describes some of the principal agencies concerned with its promotion in the United Kingdom and on mainland Europe. The second, *Community Development and Tenant Action* by Jerry Smith examines the role of community development in stimulating and supporting independent collective action by tenants of public housing and the policy consequences of failing to adopt a community development approach to public sector housing management. The third, *Community Development and Sport* by Deborah McDonald and Malcolm Tungatt, highlights the issues and challenges facing providers of sport in the community, and the role that sport can play in furthering the community development aims of non-sporting agencies. The fourth booklet, *Community Development and Child Welfare* by Kath Heaton and Jennifer Sayer, identifies the contribution that community development can make to enabling children to participate in the creation of relevant and appropriate services. The fifth, *Community Development and the Arts*, by Lola Clinton, analyses the impact of the arts on community development, and sets out the key issues for action in the 1990s.

ACRE's involvement with this booklet stems from the desire to have rural community development discussed as widely as possible and brought to the forefront of other agendas. ACRE particularly welcomes the inclusion of rural issues in this series.

We hope you find the series helpful; if you wish to talk further about community development, please don't hesitate to contact us.

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Community Development Foundation

The Community Development Foundation (CDF) was set up in 1968 to pioneer new forms of community development.

CDF strengthens communities by ensuring the effective participation of people in determining the conditions which affect their lives. It does this through:

- providing support for community initiatives
- promoting best practice
- informing policymakers at local and national level.

As a leading authority on community development in the UK and Europe, CDF is a non-departmental public body and is supported by the Voluntary Services Unit of the Home Office. It receives substantial backing from local and central government, trusts and business.

CDF promotes community development through:

- local action projects
- conferences and seminars
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- information services
- *CDF News*, a quarterly newsletter
- publications.

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ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England)

ACRE is a national charity which champions the social and economic well-being of rural people. It campaigns for policies that recognise the special needs of rural areas and that help rural communities to thrive.

At national level ACRE lobbies on issues of affordable social housing, public transport, employment, rural services, childcare, village halls, community care and health care. In addition ACRE provides specialist advice, conducts research, manages national projects, publishes a wide range of publications and provides information, training and other services.

ACRE is also the national association of 38 Rural Community Councils (RCCs) and, as such, services and supports their work with local communities. RCCs are county-level charities working to promote the welfare of village communities by encouraging self-help, local initiatives and voluntary effort. Working in partnership with other organisations, they offer advice and practical help to village hall communities, parish councils and many other groups and individuals. RCCs are actively involved in such fields as affordable housing, community care, village appraisals, transport, village services, village halls, rural arts, employment and training.

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Introduction

In this booklet we set out the most important features of rural communities, the issues around which people organise, and the main agencies and organisations operating in the rural parts of the United Kingdom. However, we recognise that there are core processes and values within community development and it would be misleading and unhelpful to make a strong separation between the urban and rural contexts.

We share the definition of community development provided in the introductory booklet to this series by Marilyn Taylor (1992). Community Development seeks to 'release the potential within communities' and it works to change the relationships between people in communities and the institutions that shape their lives. By 'community work', we mean the processes and methods used to work with local people. It is concerned with both improving relationships between individuals and groups in society, and achieving practical results.

Across the country, rural communities in villages, hamlets and small country towns can point to a long history of collective action: farming families helping each other and sharing equipment at harvest time; communal efforts to finance and build village reading rooms, halls and chapels; village fetes, carnivals and drama events; the development of agricultural trade unionism. Recent decades have seen a growing involvement in efforts to influence policies, decisions and trends which threaten the local area: school closure proposals, the deregulation of bus services, traffic congestion, coal mine closures, large new housing estates. Despite this catalogue of action, the examples of effective *community-based* action are still few and far between. Faced with enormous pressures of change – mostly but not entirely coming from outside the community – the response of rural communities has been patchy, with an extremely mixed impact on individuals, households and groups within these communities. The role and challenge of community development is to underpin what is already happening in order to make it more effective, and – importantly – to encourage the much greater majority of communities, groups and individuals to acquire the confidence and skills to take collective action. Such mobilisation of energy will only happen if the issues facing rural people touch a chord, so that people are motivated to join together. Community

1 The Rural Context

Perceptions and the reality of rural areas vary enormously. Depending on the definition used, between 80 and 90 per cent of people living in Britain live in urban areas, and not surprisingly images of rural Britain are heavily conditioned by an urban viewpoint. The 'chocolate box image' of rural life, and its contrasts with the objective conditions of many rural inhabitants, is extensively covered in numerous publications (for example Newby, 1980).

This powerful image, of a comfortable and aesthetically pleasing environment which houses an all-caring and sharing community of people, has done little to help tackle the real social and economic needs of rural areas. In fact, it has inflicted a great deal of damage in giving a false sense of satisfaction.

Community development in rural areas is not fundamentally different from elsewhere, but the rural context inevitably conditions the way in which things happen. The main factors which provide the rural context group can be defined in the following ways (Francis and Henderson, 1992; Derounian, 1993).

Striking Contrasts

Rural areas and communities are not all the same. Their size, remoteness, history, economic base, layout for example and patterns of tenure/ ownership will vary enormously. Even two adjacent villages will be quite different. For example, a village within 50 miles of London, dominated by incoming wealthy commuters and retired people, which has all but driven the local working class population into a marginal position (geographically and politically), is clearly very different from a Northern English, Scottish or Welsh former coal mining village composed of little more than a few rows of small, run-down terraced houses where the population – almost wholly working class -is declining due to out-migration and death, and there is no or little in-migration, however cheap the housing might be. There will be similarities – a declining range of services, little local employment, inaccessibility etc. – but clearly also a lot of differences.

Hidden Needs

Glossy images of the countryside mask a whole range of deprivation and disadvantage -poverty, repressive attitudes, lack of access to opportunities,

alienation of non-conformers from public life, intolerance of 'deviant' behaviour. Official statistics usually under-record the full extent of social and economic problems. People in housing need, for example, do not register on the council house waiting list if they know that there is no available housing in their village. Many people who are unemployed or underemployed do not register with the Job Centre. Frequently, those in positions of power and influence in the community will deny or play down the extent or significance of a problem.

Conservative, Individualistic Culture

Low expectations, slow adjustment to change, a class and power structure where 'everyone knows and accepts their place', and a limited experience of collective action, are all commonplace in rural communities. Even where the traditional power holders – the landowner or mill boss – have been replaced by the incoming middle classes, the position of poor and powerless people has changed little. Where the self-help ethos has prevailed, this has often been individualistic, that is leaving individuals and their households to sink or swim on their own, rather than developing a mutually supportive network of collective action across the community. Individualism, too, is also revealed in the 'anti-charity' feeling in certain rural societies which ostracises those who are dependent on state welfare benefits. This attitude is ironic in view of the heavy dependence which British agriculture has placed on state aid since the 1940s.

Attitudes to Community Action

It follows from the conservatism and individualism above that community development is not a readily understood and accepted response to problems. Experience of community work – as an intentional intervention or system of support – is even more diverse or patchy. This places participation in community affairs in an ambiguous position: newcomers can be criticised by locals for being pushy and taking over the local groups (parish council, women's institute, playgroup etc.) or conversely for being stand-offish if they do not participate. Equally, newcomers will criticise locals who do not get involved, as being apathetic.

Even where community groups do exist, they usually have a social and/or service purpose, and are not necessarily attuned to tackling issues, influencing policies, undertaking campaigns or working in partnerships with public agencies.

Approaches to Rural Development

Even though there is no common understanding of the term, there is an enormous 'industry' claiming to be involved in 'rural development'. The

Rural Development Commission, Welsh Development Agency, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the training and enterprise councils, local enterprise companies and local authorities would all share this position. However, for many agencies, rural development is synonymous with the provision of physical infrastructure – such as roads, public utilities, advance factory estates, reservoir schemes – and building new developments of regional or national significance – such as hotel/marine/golf course complexes, military airfields, nuclear power stations. Often, the community is of no direct interest, or it has a minor role as a consultee early in the process, or as the recipient of modest compensation in the case of projects with major environmental costs. Some agencies, such as the Rural Development Commission, Scottish Homes and the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council, do see the development of communities as a key part of their wider rural development strategies. From a community development perspective, it is difficult to see how rural development can have any meaning at all if it fails to focus on and engage with the people who live and work there: the community groups, individuals, small businesses and institutions.

Higher Costs, Longer Timescales

The costs of organising and delivering services, programmes, support etc. to a rural population, in small pockets or scattered over a wide area, tend to be higher than average. The unit costs of primary education, health care, policing and other public services are high because fixed costs remain high even if the number of recipients/consumers is relatively low. Added to this are higher travel costs, and more time 'lost' through longer journeys. Remoteness, sparsity and higher costs are a consideration for community development work as much as for any other activity. Conservatism and the slow pace of accommodating change also point to the need for action over a prolonged period, rather than 'short, sharp' schemes. Rarely do formulae for the distribution of government funds take proper account of these rural factors: hence the National Council for Voluntary Organisation's long-standing campaign for a 'rural premium' and additional allocation to take account of the higher costs of operating in rural areas, not unlike the London Weighting and Area Cost Allowances through which the government gives extra subsidy to South East England (NCVO, 1993; Derounian, 1993).

2 What is Rural?

Just as it is difficult to define 'community', so too for 'rural'. Most people would agree that rural areas are relatively sparsely populated: a patchwork of villages, hamlets, isolated areas and small towns, with a lot of countryside (usually farmland) in between. Farming is usually the dominant industry/employer, but in many cases coal mining, mineral extraction, forestry, fishing or even a single employer such as the Ministry of Defence are more important. With a general run-down in these employment sectors, local government services or tourism businesses may now be the most significant. With the spread of education, television, radio, commuting to work, and rural-urban population migration, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish rural society from society in general.

Pragmatically, the Rural Development Commission views its constituency as being the settlements of under 10,000 population and open countryside, but this on its own takes no account of degrees of rurality, remoteness or rural culture, nor of the relationship between villages and those towns which are rural service centres. Inevitably any definition of rurality will be blurred at the edges. Critically, community development is more about needs and problems on the ground than labels and definitions.

We can, however, identify the following broad trends in rural areas.

Population Movements

As a generalisation, the long-term movement of people from rural to urban areas, which started on a significant scale with the Industrial Revolution, has been reversed since the 1970s by a greater counter-flow from city to village. Since the 1971 census, most British cities have lost population, while many small towns and larger villages have grown. This trend masks a continuing flow, mainly by young people, out of the rural areas, to be replaced by wealthier and generally older ex-urbanites. As well as the obvious problems for those displaced, these trends have implications for the social and cultural mix of rural communities, and for those who remain behind. In addition, there are still many rural areas which continue to decline: these are mainly the remotest of areas, the National Parks (where planning controls put a moratorium on house building) and many northern

industrial villages which lack the environment and sorts of houses which are attractive to people coming in.

Changing Employment Structure

Rural primary industries, such as farming, forestry, fishing, coal mining and quarrying, have mostly shed labour enormously since the 1970s and will continue to do so into the next century. Footloose high-technology industries and tourism enterprises have grown, but not on a scale to compensate. Rural wage rates are generally low, the level of unemployment is higher than official statistics suggest, and there is an enormous level of under-employment – that is part time and seasonal work, linked to the annual cycle of tourism, farming etc. Many of the companies which have moved to rural areas have been branches, and therefore vulnerable to contraction, with decisions taken by a head office distant from the rural area. The closure of a site with only 20 staff can have a devastating effect on the rural economy and community.

Declining Services

Population decline, increasing personal mobility (at least for the majority of people), decisions to specialise and centralise, and plain lack of sensitivity by remote decision-makers, have all contributed to the major decline of village shops, schools, churches, pubs, garages, doctors surgeries, hospitals and other services. Some people have hardly suffered at all, especially if they are fit, wealthy, car owning and confident. Conversely, those who have suffered most are carless, on low incomes, disabled, those in need of very specialist or costly services, and those who are not confident to travel longer distances to 'alien' cities.

Market Orientation

Cutbacks in public sector resources, and government attempts to reduce the visible role and power of the state, coupled with the introduction of a market economy into public service provision, have further disadvantaged those on the periphery. Small farm businesses have gone into bankruptcy because many farmers have lacked the flair and resources to diversify into new products and activities. The lack or insufficiency of a 'rural premium' has further disadvantaged rural areas. True, the self-employment tradition prevalent in many rural areas has flourished where the market economy is sympathetic to small producers and suppliers, but public sector tendering contracts and the opening up of trade in Europe across state boundaries – and even the new mixed economy of social housing provision – are all favouring larger, urban-based institutions.

Erosion of Culture

Rural communities are losing their rural culture and traditions as new people move in, local people move out, and those who stay are increasingly exposed to outside influences by education, television, holidays and so on.

In the remoter parts of Britain, the survival of traditional languages is under threat. Equally, deeply-rooted values, traditions and social relationships are being challenged and eroded. This situation is complex. The 'rural way of life', as with any local culture, contains many aspects which should be preserved: a respect for and pride in local history and people's roots, an understanding of the present through 'where people have come from'. However, in the rural culture there can sometimes be found many repressive elements: sexism, racism, intolerance of strangers, social class deference and a fatalism which inhibits attempts to make progress or to influence change. The preservation of a rural way of life can also be used as an excuse for the protection of private property values by opposing new industrial and residential growth in villages.

Growing Divides

Many villages harbour enormous contrasts between wealth and poverty, different cultures and ways of life. The collection of pretty, well-maintained cottages and houses are homes to people living in abject poverty, as well as to some of the wealthiest people in the country. Arguably, it is only the deferential tradition of the rural working class which has avoided these contrasts manifesting themselves in open conflict, hostility and crime.

Environmental Awareness and Urban Rights

Should rural areas be the exclusive preserve of rural people, or do our towns and cities have rights over and within them? If rural areas are benefitting by urban cross subsidies and by urban environment policies, then arguably urban society should have some say over rural areas. In recent decades, the arguments have focused on the use of the countryside for recreation and tourism, with conflicts arising over the use of rights of way, traffic congestion, new leisure complexes in villages etc. Most recently, the growth in environmental awareness has led to 'interference' in farming techniques, rural blood sports and the design of new buildings. This poses an important problem for community development work, in seeking to respect and uphold local opinions and rights against outside processes, but at the same time looking to promote the rights of the most disadvantaged groups in urban society to have proper access to rural areas for home, work and play.

3 Community Initiatives

The point should not be lost that a good deal of community-based action in rural areas takes place with little or no community development work intervention from outside. Parish and community councils hold their meetings, and respond to consultations by the local planning authority; groups of parents – mainly women -come together and organise their own pre-school playgroups; a group of stalwarts from the main user groups form a committee to run the village hall; the village fête is the remarkable outcome of dozens of local people working on their own component part in harmony (usually) to produce an integrated whole. The contribution of community development work is to help them work, to help make things happen, to help things operate more effectively and fairly, and to help draw in those who might otherwise be excluded. The following is a small handful of examples where community development is helping community groups to tackle new issues or carry out their existing work more effectively.

Housing

The shortage of appropriate and adequate housing at a price or rent which is accessible and affordable by local people is a major issue in many rural areas. It causes direct hardship to the individuals concerned, and it distorts the social composition of many communities.

Matters have been exacerbated by UK government policy since the mid 1980s to prohibit council house building and to restrict the level of government subsidy. Yet in England and Scotland especially, there has been a growth of community action to secure new housing. Typically this process begins with the community conducting a detailed survey of housing need which includes, where possible, those who have reluctantly moved away as well as the current residents.

Following the analysis and interpretation of the findings, the community will select and work with a housing association (which will build and manage the property) and the relevant authorities to find and acquire a site, agree on house design and specifications, secure the necessary funding and agree on a lettings policy (that is deciding principles of priority, rather than selecting individual tenants). Regrettably, some local authorities have

effectively excluded communities from involvement in most stages of the process, after the initial survey.

Attention to the fine detail of people's specific needs and circumstances has been the hallmark of village-based housing initiatives in Wiltshire (see Farrow, 1993). Locally-based action by parish councils, supported by rural community council workers there, has emphasised the need for persistence and professionalism if communities are to participate effectively in the complex social housing system which had been dominated by professional local authority managers.

Although most current initiatives are concerned with new provision, in some areas the main priority is to secure improvements in the condition of the existing housing stock. Alongside these initiatives, increasing attention is being given to the problem of rural homelessness: a rural problem which is exported to and manifested in the streets of major cities and seaside resorts.

Tackling housing issues is a specialist area of community action, normally benefitting from a community development input, to:

- give people the confidence to tackle the issue in the first place
- help with the technicalities of a large social survey and its interpretation
- help people understand and negotiate with 'the system'
- help people reconcile the often conflicting demands of development versus conservation, and of different housing-related needs within the community
- give people the confidence and staying power to remain with the housing development process through to completion.

Further reading: ACRE, 1993

Village Services

Faced with the prospect of village school and shop closures, a decline of bus services, pubs being sold off as lucrative housing sites etc., local communities can either accept it – however regretfully – as inevitable, or they can try and change things. Many communities are alerting themselves to the need to make better and fuller use of what still remains, most notably through 'use it or lose it' publicity campaigns, for example, school governing bodies are keen to attract young families to their village and persuade them not to send their children to some other school or consumers are encouraged to make a greater proportion of their purchases in the village shop. Extra support is being given by outside agencies to ensure that local facilities market themselves to ensure that they are attractive and relevant to local

community needs. Increasingly, local authorities are the targets of campaigns by villages to keep open local services such as schools and day centres for older people.

Where services have closed, or where they never existed in the first place, communities have sometimes rallied round to organise their own provision. The examples of practical action are numerous and many of the longer established ones are described in Steve Woollett's *Alternative Rural Services* (1981) which is both a set of case-studies and a guide for local group action. The community-run shops, pubs and schools of today have much in common with the co-operative shops, working mens clubs and church schools of 100 years ago. Community development work has operated on two planes: at a local level it has advised, counselled and inspired communities to address these issues, and it has also operated in the wider arena of policy making to influence decisions on behalf of local interests.

Village Halls and Community Centres

It is difficult for rural communities – and groups within them – to flourish without a comfortable, accessible and affordable meeting place. In contrast to other resources in the villages, village halls and community centres have almost always been held and managed by local committees, usually composed of representatives of the main user groups. There was certainly a thriving social movement of village hall committees in the 1920s, when many of the current halls were actually built. Committees face a constant struggle, whether between competing users for scarce accommodation or finding sufficient users to keep the place open, or coping with the depredations of rising costs and new legislative requirements. As well as managing a building, village hall committees also constitute a group of people who may be well placed to identify unmet needs in the community and develop initiatives to meet them. Providing support for such committees has for many decades been an important element in rural community development.

From her experience in rural Hampshire and further afield, Louise Beaton (1993) has pointed to the struggle which village hall committees face in balancing the competing demands of different user-groups, with the practicalities of maintaining the physical structure of their hall and complying with statutory requirements. At the same time, they need to remain vigilant to ensure that less organised or articulate groups and individuals are not excluded from the use and management of the hall. Nevertheless, work with village halls has proved effective not only in providing a focal point for community activity, but also as a springboard into wider rural social and economic regeneration initiatives (Marsden in West Yorkshire -Horton, 1993).

Farming

For most of the past 30 years there has been little connection between the support mechanisms of farming and wider social, economic and community development structures in rural areas. Particularly in terms of high subsidies and production levels, farmers were among the privileged classes in rural society. Agricultural workers fared differently: thousands lost their jobs (and, in many cases, their tied houses as well) over this period, but the fact that it was a slow, steady leakage in small numbers spread over a massive area, meant that the individual grief did not add up to a massive protest movement or cause for public alarm.

EC and GATT curbs on agricultural production, declining government subsidies, declining markets for over-produced commodities, and high interest rates on capital borrowing, have changed all of this. Many farmers are now living in poverty and facing bankruptcy, and farming now has the second highest suicide rate among 160 occupational classes. This has resulted in a number of community development initiatives recently:

- the development of an 'agricultural support network' to provide counselling, advice and information to help some of the most isolated workers in society to cope with the psychological stress of redundancy, indebtedness, business failure and dispossession from the land. For example in Herefordshire in the late 1980s farming bodies such as the National Farmers Union teamed up with churches, citizen's advice bureaux, the Samaritans and rural community councils to provide a coherent package of support, conditioned by understanding and insight.
- in the remotest of areas, a community development approach has been taken to the protection of small farmers' collective interests and to marketing, diversification and related issues. New trade unions, mutual support networks, marketing co-operatives and locally-organised training courses are all examples of action taken in the South Armagh and Fermanagh areas of Northern Ireland as part of the EC-funded Northern Ireland Rural Action Project (Rural Action Project (N.I.), 1989).
- in several parts of the country such as Bedfordshire and Northumberland, farmers are part of a network to encourage visits by community and school groups, from big cities in the region. These networks, often supported by rural community councils, exist to promote urban-rural understanding and have a serious educational role, alongside their more obvious recreational and leisure purpose.

Economic Development

With a few notable exceptions, such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise agencies have not made the link between business support and community development until recently. Economic development in rural areas was concerned primarily with individual people's enterprise and with attracting larger firms from elsewhere. It is only in the last 10 or 15 years that there has been a growing interest in the idea that village communities might effectively develop their own economic activities, and promote a wealth-sharing ethos to the small businesses which already exist. This has been triggered by the collapse of traditional employment in many rural areas, coupled with a growing appreciation that rural communities will lose their vitality if they become places for people to live in but work elsewhere. To some extent, it has also needed a cultural change to accept that the development of people's economic activity and wealth creation can be tackled collectively. In many areas, in the absence of new businesses moving in, there has simply been no alternative. Numerous examples exist:

- community groups acquiring and renovating land and buildings to house new local business
- pubs, shops, bed & breakfast operators and other local people coming together to market the local area for tourism and selling weekend package holidays which give a flavour of the everyday life and culture of the community (for example, Country Weekend breaks in the Leominster Marches area of the English-Welsh borders, CPF, 1983)
- collective approaches to the provision of skills, training and new job creation in villages
- the development of credit unions to promote confidence and responsibility in handling personal finance, and to overcome the problem of loan sharks and mounting levels of indebtedness
- the development of telecottages which bring together under one roof a multitude of high-tech office equipment for use by community groups, self-employed people and small businesses which could not afford their own (see ACRE/Centre for Rural Studies, 1990).

Further reading: Johnstone et al., 1990.

Village Appraisals

The village appraisal is a structured approach to the analysis of local needs and aspirations, and the development and implementation of an action programme to address them. Crucially, it is undertaken by and for the local

community. Their incidence has grown since the early 1970s, promoted by local community workers and assisted at times by national initiatives (such as advice packs, competitions, computer software and promotional videos). Early village appraisals were largely concerned with trying to influence council-run planning policies but later ones had a much broader vision, and have embodied a greater degree of community self-help. Their agenda and degree of ambition is as wide as local people choose. The important point is that they should be orientated towards action, so that the publication of a village appraisal report or plan is an interim stage, not an end in itself.

As with all good community development, the process in village appraisals is as important as the product: they are a means of opening-up decision making to the whole community, and not just a means of improving the environment or confirming the proposals of the local planning authority. This was vividly illustrated by Rosemary Lumb, in her critique of her own work with the village appraisals in Allenheads, Northumberland, where a pragmatic response to the everyday pressures by influential individuals often compromised her desire to secure participation and reflection by the wider community (Lumb, 1990). At their best, village appraisals will give groups and individuals within the community, and outside agencies, a greater understanding of the diversity of opinions and interests in that community. They will present opportunities to consider these differences, and translate ideas into proposals and practical action. Village appraisals are about making things happen, and not just opposing change.

Further reading: ACRE/CGCHE, 1991.

Environmental Action

Since the 1970s there has been a growth in community-based action to oppose developments which may have a considerable effect on the environment. While some of this is attributed to the NIMBY attitude ('not in my backyard') where newly-arrived incomers to a village oppose all further growth and change, the pressure of larger-scale alien proposals have often served to unite all local interests in a common campaign. Niall Fitzduff has described how a relatively quiet, mixed and scattered community on the shores of Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland united to oppose a damaging intrusion of opencast lignite mining by a multi-national company (Fitzduff, 1993).

Especially since the 1980s, there has also been growing interest in community-based positive environmental action – not only tree planting and pond clearing, but also energy conservation and waste recycling. In Wylam, Northumberland, the parish council initiated and co-ordinated a

multi-faceted recycling scheme where different groups in the community (such as churches, schools, women's institutes etc.) each take the lead in recycling a particular commodity (paper, glass, old clothes etc.) (NCVO, 1990). Across rural England, three government agencies – the Countryside Commission, Rural Development Commission and English Nature – have teamed up in Rural Action to finance and encourage broadly-based action by local community groups, with a strong community development, as well as environmental, objective. Increasingly, environmentalism is providing the link between the community and the world through the adage 'think global, act local'.

Further reading: Roome, 1993.

4 Agencies, Programmes and Action

Community development work in the rural parts of the UK, like the experience of community activists on the ground, has a long history but it is extremely sparse and patchy. Although it has been around in some shape or form since the 1920s, for many years it was limited to relatively few counties, and to arms' length support for a limited range of activities, including village halls, parish councils, music and drama and a certain amount of voluntary personal social service work. It was not until the appointment of field officers to English and Welsh rural community councils in the mid-1970s, followed by the development of community education workers in Scottish regional councils, that there was any recognisable community development network in rural Britain. Even so, the isolation of many of these workers means that the term network is perhaps an exaggeration, and their sparse distribution across vast rural patches has meant that they have rarely had the opportunity to focus on and work in depth with a single community over a period of time.

In many areas, it is only through the availability of extra funds for a limited period of one to three years that a community development agency has been able to focus attention on a single area and, even then, these areas have sometimes still been sizeable, typically 100 square miles.

Institutional arrangements for rural community development are a little different in the four 'countries' of the UK.

England

The main agencies are rural community councils (RCCs) which exist in all rural counties; some also cover the rural parts of metropolitan counties. RCCs are voluntary organisations, largely reliant on local authority support, and funding from the Rural Development Commission (RDC), a QUANGO linked to the Department of the Environment, with a primary interest in the social and economic development of rural England. Some RCCs employ only staff with a county-wide brief; others have workers covering much smaller patches. RCCs monitor and research rural trends, and take action to influence local and central government policies. Most RCCs have a

close working relationship with parish councils, village-based local authorities which have a limited range of executive power to provide local amenities, and which can precept (that is make a levy) on the local taxation system. RCCs are supported nationally by ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) which provides advice, information and training on rural community development as well as running its own research and development projects.

A handful of local authorities are directly involved in community development work in rural England, although most others would claim to provide community support services, such as grant aid. Beyond the RCCs and local authorities, community development is even more sporadic: a few district-level councils of voluntary service (CVS), some churches and church-related organisations, some area wide specialist voluntary organisations (for example Age Concern and the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations).

Nationally, advice and ideas on rural community development is also available from NCVO (the National Council for Voluntary Organisations) and the Rural Churches Centre. There are no specific vocational training courses for rural community work, although many generic courses have a rural component. The Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education provides several distance learning courses on locally-based action, which include elements of community development work.

Wales

Although the county voluntary councils of Wales (CVCs) shared a common history with English RCCs over many decades, their development since the mid-1980s has pushed them away from rural community development towards the development of voluntary personal social services work, largely due to the particular source of their core funding within the Welsh Office. As a result, many have lost their long-standing links with the Welsh parish-level community council network, and any work on wider rural development issues has to take second place to this new core emphasis. Nevertheless, in the absence of any other network, these CVCs continue to hold a generic community development brief. They are connected through a national network, which is linked closely into the Wales Council for Voluntary Action.

Apart from a limited range of local initiatives funded by Mid Wales Development (the Development Board for Rural Wales), there is no other *coherent* state sponsorship of rural community development in Wales.

Scotland

Unlike England and Wales, community development is primarily a function of the local authority education departments, although community education workers often have to fit this alongside their responsibilities for adult education and youth work. Community enterprise has a more established support and development structure in Scotland, and many local authorities employ staff in those units with a community development brief. The social work departments of local authorities all have a 'community orientation' but, with a few exceptions, the extent to which this is translated into community development as opposed to volunteer recruitment is limited.

The Scottish voluntary sector appears to be less developed than its English and Welsh counterparts and the district-level councils of voluntary service do not enjoy the level of funding or other support of the RCCs. Their involvement in community development work is therefore sporadic.

At a national level, rural community development in Scotland is promoted by the pressure group Rural Forum, by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Scottish Centre for Community Development, the Scottish Community Education Council and the independent research body the Arkleton Trust.

Northern Ireland

Community development has been viewed suspiciously by British decision-makers in the past due to concerns about sectarian conflict. As a result, there was little state-sponsored community development activity of any sort, other than the appointment of community services officers in the leisure and recreational services departments of a handful of the district councils which chose to avail themselves of the state funding for these posts. More recently, EC Poverty Programme funding supported the Northern Ireland Rural Action Project which undertook a number of innovative community development projects in all corners of the province. This in turn has led to the creation of two parallel national bodies, each with a rural community development interest: the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council and the Rural Community Network (Northern Ireland). The former is primarily a consortium of government departments, but with its own portfolio of local development projects; the latter is primarily a mutual support network for independent community groups.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Rural issues have achieved a higher profile in recent years. At a general level, a range of organisations have been effective in publicising rural questions, and in lobbying for them to be taken seriously. Publication of *Faith in the Countryside* in 1990 was a reflection of concerns held within society as a whole about the future of rural life. We have touched on what the major concerns are.

It is also noticeable that some of the issues being championed have acquired a sharper edge. Three which stand out are

- issues around the environment, especially fears about the impact of industrial and nuclear waste on the quality of life
- a growing realisation of the extent to which large industrial closures can devastate the economic and social life of rural communities which have traditionally been dependent on single industries
- the housing crisis facing many rural people when, usually as a result of the arrival of wealthier incomers, they find it impossible to obtain housing in their communities.

These three issues appear to us to have established a solidity, and to have built up a head of steam, which policymakers cannot ignore.

Has community development kept pace with the stronger presence of rural issues? In terms of its willingness and capacity to engage with the issues, and to demonstrate how community development has a crucially important contribution to make in working on them, it probably has. Even those organisations most committed to national campaigning and lobbying are aware of the need to acknowledge the differences which exist between communities and of the importance of making issues relevant to rural communities. Community development's role, therefore, in working on issues with local people and their organisations, helping to mobilise popular support, is widely recognised.

The problem lies in the scarceness of community development resources available. Quite simply, there are very few agencies from which rural

community development can be practised, and we believe that the case for strengthening practice in this sense is very strong. We make the point in *Working with Rural Communities* (1992) that rural community development rarely seems to have been in charge of its own direction or destiny:

> 'It is as if there have been hundreds of focal points of rural community work in the UK, all doing their own thing, largely in isolation from each other, and with relatively little capacity to learn and improve their practice' (p. 141).

What is required is a strategic approach to ensuring that rural community development is equipped to be able to respond effectively to the rural issues which demand attention. We suggest that the following are the main elements of such an approach.

Consolidation of the community work occupation

A wide range of individuals and organisations are involved in practising community work in rural areas, and there is a need to recognise both the common and diverse interests among them. The scope for building upon the common interests of fieldworkers from different agencies, and resource-providers, policymakers and others is considerable. The basis of this process should be to expose rural community workers to a greater variety of ideas, values and experiences.

In particular, there is a strong case for extending and strengthening the links between practitioners across the UK. The details of many of the situations may be different, but many of the principles are the same. A greater realisation among rural practitioners of the methods they use would also bridge the gap between rural and urban; the rural world has a lot to learn from the extensive range of practical and theoretical material based on urban practice. It is crucial that exchanges between practitioners on a UK basis are concerned with critical analysis and clarification of central ideas as well as with the sharing of experience.

Promotion of a 'community' approach

Precisely because rural agencies are having to respond to difficult and controversial issues in communities, it is important that the advantages of the community approach are articulated by those people and organisations involved in rural community development. This process can take place at a number of levels, from parishes to large development agencies such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the local enterprise companies and training and enterprise councils. It is a question of finding ways of putting

the case for community development at centre stage of policy formulation, rather than allowing it to remain struggling unnoticed in the wings.

Appreciation of the Europe-wide perspective

In the last few years, rural agencies have begun to establish useful links with their counterparts in other European countries. Compared with rural community workers in Ireland (North and South), those in Wales, Scotland and England still have some way to go. However, links have been established with the Trans-European Rural Network and understanding of the agricultural and rural development programmes of the European Commission has grown.

We can only see the Europe-wide dimension growing in the 1990s, and the need for there to be clear social and community development perspectives presented alongside the mainstream economic ones is clear. If rural community workers are to be alert to the social, economic and cultural impact of the 'new Europe' (regional imbalances, increased unemployment, 'social dumping' by companies, they will need to be well organised and be increasingly sophisticated in their knowledge of European developments and networks.

A reappraisal of values

There is a need to reappraise concepts of 'rural' and 'community' in the light of the socially mixed communities which are becoming the norm in many parts of the UK. Those involved in rural community development need to contribute to this process of research and reflection as well as be informed by it: what is rural community development trying to achieve? Are the aims mutually compatible?

In addition, the question of process and product, referred to earlier in relation to village appraisals, needs to be broadened to connect with a wider debate on the values and aims of community development. In particular, there is a case for rural community development to balance its concern with functional purposes – getting village halls built, helping parish councils to fight school closures etc. – by rediscovering the developmental aspects of rural work (Francis and Henderson, 1992).

A reappraisal of rural values must also take account of people's prejudices and fears, exhibited in particular by racism, sexism and ageism. These aspects of intolerance are to be found as embedded in rural communities as they are in urban ones (see, for example, Derounian, 1993), the difference being perhaps that in the former the intolerance is less overt. The extent of racism in South-west England revealed by the research of Jay (1992) shocked many people involved in rural community development. There is

a growing realisation that positive steps have to be taken to combat prejudices.

Responsibility and citizenship

Rural community development should be concerned with more than local, parochial issues. It needs to keep returning to the theme of supporting the development of active, responsible citizens. The increase of centralisation, the growth of the corporate state, should be challenged and balanced by citizens who, as a result of being involved in community development, have the knowledge, skills and confidence to play a part in the wider society. The challenge for the community worker is to build an agenda for developing political responsibility and citizenship which is appropriate to the local culture.

A concern for strategy and effectiveness

Only if rural community development succeeds in adopting a more strategic approach will it have a chance of attracting the resources which are needed to respond to rural issues. An emphasis on strategy is relevant to a number of contexts – local, regional, national and Europe-wide. However it is particularly in discussions of partnerships between national organisations, and when lobbying government agencies such as the Rural Development Commission and the Countryside Commission, that strategy is crucial. In that way, the profile of rural community development can be raised and the arguments put for expanding resources for it.

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