Fit for measure? Evaluation in community development

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Abstract　Community development is a process where people concerned with social and environmental justice act together as engaged and active citizens[1] to change their collective circumstances. A concern to deliver change through these processes raises the questions: How do we know if our work is effective? What do we mean by and how do we assess outcomes? What 'evidence' will help us articulate and improve how we do our work? Over the past decades, there has been a growing trend globally towards evaluation to understand and improve practice. Nevertheless, there is a lack of clarity about, and application of, appropriate frameworks for community development evaluation (Motherway, 2006; CDF, 2010; Whelan *et al.*, 2019). Drawing on current practice, this paper explores challenges, principles and methods for evaluation in community development. We argue that 'measurement' requires a clear understanding and agreement of community development purpose and processes, including recognition of community as within and beyond place. Drawing on international evaluation criteria and models, we conclude that community development work could learn from these, as long as communities are in central decision-making roles. We offer suggestions for principles to inform evaluation efforts in community development, suggesting that good community development processes and associated outcomes represent in themselves a theory of change.

Introduction

In his seminal article, *Theorizing Community Development* (2004, p. 5), Bhattacharyya presents a formula for a 'parsimonious definition of community

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1 Citizen here is used in its broadest sense – not primarily linked to state recognition.

development' that connects and distinguishes between community development purpose, methods and tools. This definition presents the purpose of community work as the promotion of solidarity and development of agency but omits focus on the subsequent outcomes from the combined symmetry of purpose, methods and tools. This is not unusual for that time. Whilst many community work definitions refer to task (or purpose), and processes, attributing these dimensions to outcomes is rare.

Indeed, the matter of measuring impact is complex and can be misconstrued and misunderstood. 'There is no simple, universal, magic solution to the challenge of measuring community development impacts' according to Motherway (2006, p. 36). In this quote, it is unclear whether the term universal means global or a one size fits all measurement – neither applicable across diverse communities and contexts. The use of the term 'magical' suggests an image of naive practitioners seeking to conjure up extraordinary and miraculous solutions. Whilst the wording used may be ideologically suggestive, the statement does point to the 'messy' business of demonstrating outcomes in community development, highlighting tensions between different research ideologies and subsequent methodology and approaches.

Standard measurement tools are uncommon in community development. Indeed, a recent Irish report on evaluation in community development suggests there is a limited culture of evaluating programmes in the community development sphere (Whelan *et al.*, 2019, p. 48). Previously, the Independent Expert Panel on Community Development UK bemoaned the dearth of evidence in asserting outcomes: 'The Community Development field needs to develop more compelling evidence and examples of the impacts and outcomes of its practice' (CDF, 2010, p. 20). Other authors highlight the absence of suitable 'measurement tools' to produce evidence (Barr and Hashagen, 2000; Lee, 2006; Motherway, 2006). These and other challenges are discussed in this article.

Framed by community work praxis and evaluation perspectives, we examine the theme of demonstrating outcomes in community development work. Although there have been significant expansions in the methodology of programme evaluation over the last decades (Greene and McClintock, 1991; Fine *et al.*, 2000; Albert *et al.*, 2019), not all may be appropriately contextualized to community development principles and practice. Drawing on commonly used international criteria standards for evaluation, we examine the importance of recognizing community development as a 'theory of change' in itself and suggest we could learn from international evaluation practice if communities are central to its design and delivery.

How difficult is community development to evaluate?

Evaluation is a process that critically examines a community project or a programme. It involves collecting and analysing information about a project's activities, characteristics and outcomes. According to Patton (1987), the purpose of an evaluation is to make judgments about an initiative to improve its effectiveness and ultimately inform management decisions. For communities, community workers and funders who are concerned with change, evaluation provides a useful basis for concluding how good, valuable or important something is (Davidson, 2004). Nevertheless, a recent report on evaluation in community development concluded 'it is extremely difficult to capture the impacts of activities and spending that occur at the community level' (Whelan *et al.*, 2019, p. 45). In this section, we unearth a number of other frequently met issues and challenges in evaluating community development projects.

Language and terminology contain ideological and theoretical under-pinnings. As Mitchell and Correa-Velez (2009) in their development of an evaluation framework for community development with survivors of torture and trauma reported, their starting point was a common conceptu-alisation of key terminology. Unfortunately, in situations where community development is contested and/or misunderstood, evaluation frameworks will be difficult to operationalize. An associated issue is that some community workers may not be clear on the work itself: 'We need help with defining the components of community development so we know what is to be evaluated' (Longstaff, 2008, p. 9). Evidently clarity about what community work is seeking to achieve and the theory on which it is based needs to be commonly understood and articulated. Turning to a European definition, the European Community Development Network suggests that the purpose of community development is to help 'create the conditions for a just, inclusive and sustainable society by supporting communities to engage in collective action for transformative change' (EUCDN, 2014, p. 16). Community development theory suggests it is a theory of change in itself. Too often evaluation results demonstrate that well-intended activities took place without linking to a coherent theory of change (Connell and Kubisch, 1998; Annie, 2004; Klugman, 2011). Agreement about what needs to change, how this can happen and the role different agents have in achieving it is required.

An unsteady theory base is an issue identified by Barr (2005) who found that community workers in the United Kingdom struggled to link their practice with the theory they espoused. As a result, he claimed 'they became victims of what Specht (1975) described as "large hopes but small realities"' (Specht, 1975 cited in Barr, 2005, p. 2). Similarly, Longstaff (2008) in a UK

report titled *The Community Development Challenge Evaluation* concluded that community work urgently needed to 'raise its sights and increase its demonstrable effectiveness' but is hampered by a lack of clarity about its own theory of change: 'Without an explicit understanding of what a community development initiative is striving to support and achieve, it is hard to assess whether projects have been successful even incrementally, and if not, why not . . . "Theory based" evaluation is recommended, whereby the assumed relationships between interventions and effects are identified or "surfaced"' (Longstaff, 2008, p. 14).

Another challenge related to community development itself is naming outcomes related to both task and process dimensions. Some ambiguity can exist here. For example, Ife (2010, p. 46) reflects on the importance of both task and process but emphasizes process.

> ... indeed for community development the process is more important than the outcome...the role of a community worker is not 'to ensure a good outcome' but rather to ensure a good process... To the extent that outcomes becomes processes (ends become means to further ends), they are themselves important.

Clearly, process and outcome dimensions are important, assessing both can be challenging, and different approaches and indicators will be needed to evaluate each. Whilst evaluation indicators can be devised based on facts, figures and judgments, feeling or perceptions can also be used to measure change. All may confirm progress towards achievement of a specific result. With regard to approaches employed, a difficulty, as argued by Fox (2003, p. 83), is that 'qualitative knowledge advanced by practitioners . . . may be downgraded as mere anecdote'.

Another key measurement challenge is the baseline against which community development progress and effectiveness indicators are assessed. The baseline is the fixed reference point and requires that 'someone' has decided which data and background information provide the basis for measuring change at the end of a project. The construction of a baseline presents a challenge in community development evaluation, as we are dealing with the transformation of communities' situation over the long term, rather than an artificial (evaluation) snapshot time period in their lives. Baselines against which indicators of change are gauged also highlight the often inappropriate short-term nature of community development funding. This recurring circumstance is significant for trying to make definitive conclusions regarding outcomes that relate to a short-lived and condensed projects. This presents a challenge in providing 'evidence' of outcomes as well as posing risks to practitioners. As concluded in a survey of community development workers and managers in the United Kingdom, 'Short-term funding increases the risk of failure' (CDF, 2010, p. 15). Conversely, others argue that measuring

long-term impact from community development interventions itself is a challenge, 'given that community development is largely concerned with wider outcomes that it cannot control' (Barr and Hashagen, 2000, p. 59). Broadly, evaluations require discussion, agreement and clarity on the scope or key parameters including time and geographic areas covered and whether to focus on a project phase or specific elements of the project.

The purpose of an evaluation may well present the greatest difficulty in community development. Is it to review the implementation and assess the extent to which the objectives of the project were achieved? Is it to support learning and bring this learning to the community? Is it to inform national programme or policy formation? Is it a combination of these? Unfortunately evaluations are habitually commissioned because they are included in terms of a funding contract or commissioned for public relations rather than necessarily to learn from what has catalysed change. Funders are often the main sponsors of evaluation and exert considerable influence (Bamberger, 2000). From a funder's perspective, evaluations can often be used to determine results of a programme from their perspective to decide whether the initiative merits continued funding. Cameron *et al.* (2016) observe, even with an increase in evaluation evidence, it does not necessarily mean that it has catalysed greater learning amongst policymakers and researchers (we would add learning amongst community stakeholders to their analysis). Thus, an intrinsic challenge is the difficulty of defining what is actually of value, who decides and what happens as a result.

Individuals leading the evaluation process, their worldview and their skill base, are also highly significant. Time pressures and budgets for using innovative or tailored approaches often affect the evaluator(s). An associated challenge based on existing evaluation models is to establish an evaluation framework with a focus beyond local neighbourhood work, where most existing models are concerned. A limited focus on neighbourhood change limits community work interventions to a self-help frame and a local improvement agenda. To maximize its transformational potential, community development measurement indicators must reflect issue-based work with a broader geographical focus and transformative agenda.

In this section, we have outlined some difficulties associated with evaluation in community development. Nonetheless, whilst community development may be difficult to evaluate, it is not impossible. Moreover, for many reasons evaluation is essential. Can international practice in evaluation provide inspiration? The next sections discuss standard criteria and varied methodologies used in evaluations internationally.

Learning from international criteria and models

We often look to international practice or standards that seem widely accepted, sometimes without assessing the adaptability of widely used tools in different contexts and social realities. The international aid and development world have generated an industry around evaluation as a professional discipline with numerous courses, conferences and workshops to exchange praxis and a range of peer-reviewed journals. International aid programmes attempt to systematically determine the merit, worth and significance of projects funded from outside, using criteria governed by a set of standards. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Principles for Evaluation (OECD, 1992) has had a profound impact on evaluation on international development circles, and these criteria have spread far afield. Five evaluation criteria stem from the definition of evaluation from the DAC evaluation group (above): (1) relevance, (2) efficiency, (3) effectiveness, (4) impact and (5) sustainability. Although under review, these tend to be widely accepted criteria upon which evaluation are based (OECD, 2013). Whilst helpful, these criteria may prove problematic for community development depending on how such criteria are interpreted, how questions are formulated around these principles and how evaluation is used. It should be noted that in late 2019 new and improved definitions of the original five criteria appeared, and one new criterion, coherence, added (OECD, 2019). Below we critique these criteria taking a community development praxis approach and conclude that the questions and methodology that go with the criteria are what count, rather than the criteria themselves.

As an evaluation criteria, there can be a tendency to overemphasize relevance (1) in terms of how the objectives of the programme fit with agendas of funders rather than the relevance to the community itself (Chianca, 2008). Evaluating programme objectives should primarily assess how those at the centre of the community development initiative view its relevance. Relevance to the broader policy context that requires change can also be an important focus. The use of relevance does help community development to look beyond local neighbourhoods, a challenge mentioned above.

Taking other two evaluation criteria (2) efficiency and (3) effectiveness together, *value for money* is a term we often hear, with a focus on what we can monetize (e.g. values for goods and services that are bought and sold on the market). However, not everything can be monetized, and an emphasis on value for money should be tempered by close consideration of what is being valued. A least cost option may be efficient, but not effective; therefore incorporating effectiveness into assessments of value for money is essential. For example, a community development programme can be transformative in terms of social cohesion; yet, there is no market or monetized values

on these. Fortunately evaluation frameworks in recent years are gradually moving towards a more holistic approach beyond financial or monetary appraisal. Because wider and hidden benefits often accrue to programme interventions, which are not picked up under value for money, and many lie outside the market system, a key community development perspective question is who decides on the efficiency and effectiveness of a project reaching its outcomes. In the current political climate, quantifiable results are often seen as more persuasive to avoid funding cuts. Although considering the major factors influencing the project outputs and outcomes, using economic-type terms may place the focus on the least costly (rather than longer-term) resources to achieve results; efficiency reminds us that we have to be creative with scarce resources. Conversely community development programmes have often proven to be innovative and effective with limited resources, and these considerations can be highlighted in an evaluation.

Impact (4) attempts to assess whether the intervention contributes to reaching higher-level objectives, preferably the overall theory of change embedded in the community development programme. Impact sometimes seeks to make a value judgement on the positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by an intervention, using before/after and/or with/without comparison (DFID, 2005). Assessing impact of a community development programme requires both quantitative and qualitative data and must emphasize how the theory of change worked in practice, which essentially should have been referred to or acted as a monitoring tool throughout. Sustainability (5) criteria should really require an emphasis on those at the centre of the intervention deciding the parameters of what will be measured as sustainable. Financial sustainability and self-reliance are too often the focus of sustainability. Sustained political support, cultural appropriateness, adequacy of technology and institutional capacity should also be considered under the principles of sustainability (Chianca, 2008).

Generally the OECD evaluation criteria do not seem to emphasize bottom-up community development approaches and appear to focus more on logic, measurable results, sometimes missing important relationships and difficult to measure criteria. Gender, equity and inclusion of the most vulnerable groups appear to be missing. At first glance, the OECD evaluation criteria do not particularly appear suited to community development. However, we argue that the use of these criteria depends on the evaluation questions and ultimately who commissions the evaluation and why (often the funders or implementing agency) and whose preferences and priorities count. Too often the community members are not involved in deciding the evaluation questions and focus of these broad criteria. This brings us back to the central question of what evaluations are really for, accountability or

learning? Moving beyond criteria to guide an evaluation, we now turn to examine a range of methodologies and data typically used.

Evaluation methodologies

Turning the focus to the methodology chosen to reach evaluation conclusions, community development evaluation models appear to have been designed, applied and in many cases imposed on community workers and communities over the past two decades in particular.

Funders, who must demonstrate accountability of public sector spending, frequently influence evaluation methodological options. Thus, in recent years, evaluation methodologies in widespread use tend to have a strong 'results-based management' (RBM) focus. RBM concerns planning and budgeting, monitoring and evaluating results as well as reporting to funders. These approaches are typically used at a particular point in the lifespan of a project to clarify ongoing and emerging issues (mid-term evaluations) and in summative evaluations. Vähämäki *et al.* (2011) outline that there is a growing amount of literature and research which point to the difficulties and challenges associated with implementing RBM within the development community, particularly due to its overemphasis on quantitative results. Funders do require data in the form of numbers, proportions and ratios and appreciate statistical analysis to inform their own management decisions and accountability systems. Typical questions required to justify programmes include how many people were reached by a project? What was the unit cost per person reached? For how much and for how many people did income improve? How many passed and obtained a certificate in a particular skill? Such a focus is somewhat understandable, given that some funders are accountable to taxpayers who scrutinize the use of public funding. A focus on quantifiable data and its emphasis on generalizability, statistics and numeric data are often easier to manage and more succinct to report. Tallies and costs hold an important place in determining patterns of effectiveness and impact, making our observations more explicit. Yet, some change is more descriptive and can be observed but cannot be easily computed. Thus, we would advocate caution on an overfocus on numbers and ratios alone.

Outcome mapping—a model used in international development circles is based on theory of change frameworks, attempting to clarify the presumed logical intended relationships amongst the objects of a programme, project or activity. For example, literacy classes can lead to enhanced reading skills and numeracy but also to an increase in confidence and ultimately better quality of life outcomes. This model seeks to attribute causes to impacts in order to establish how particular interventions leading to particular outputs

can be generalizable, i.e. given the same conditions will result in the same outcomes. However, better reading skills do not necessarily always map to better quality of life outcomes. Many other factors may be relevant. We know from community development praxis that attributing action to outcomes is problematic for a myriad of reasons, not least because power dynamics and agency are ignored. Another iteration, *Outcome Harvesting*, does not measure progress towards predetermined objectives (which are often devised outside the community). Rather, it collects evidence of what has changed and, then, working backwards, determines whether and how an intervention contributed to these changes (Wilson-Grau and Britt, 2012). *Outcome Harvesting* in evaluation would, in the example above, start with a description of the perceived change (better reading or an increase in confidence); then interview informants to review, revise and expand initial outcome descriptions; then adjust; and then discuss the implications in consultation with information. Thus, the main difference *to Outcome Mapping* is that outcomes are not predefined.

A promising approach, the *Most Significant Change (MSC)* technique, is used as a form of monitoring and evaluation where communities are asked to describe changes in their lives. Community stakeholders themselves decide the sorts of change that should be recorded. Stories are how participants describe changes. Facilitators ask questions such as: "During the last month, in your opinion, what was the most significant change that took place for you?" Domains of change can be defined, such as changes in the quality of people's life, changes in the nature of participation in an activity or changes in community organizations (Davies and Dart, 2005). Once time has been spent listening to stories of change, participants sit together, reread the stories aloud and discuss the value of the change in the stories. Later stories are analysed and filtered. Stakeholders themselves (rather than outsiders alone) are involved in analysing the data and deciding thematic categories of change. Funders are ultimately asked to assess the stories (Davies and Dart, 2005). MSC can provide data on impact and outcomes, which can be helpful in assessing the performance of the project in relation to its theory of change. We believe MSC is particularly suited to community development as it places individuals in communities at the centre of discussions on impact. Furthermore, MSC can also be used to assess how work at the community level actually moved up to influence different levels – one of the challenges mentioned above – such as local authorities or local politicians or beyond.

MSC brings us back to the core question highlighted earlier: evaluation for what purpose? This relates to who does the analysis and who makes the judgement on the value of a project, an initiative or a community development process. Is it communities and if so, who within those communities? Community workers? Funders? Outside evaluators/facilitators or some

combination of these? A concern to give voice to the excluded and other groups involved in, and affected, by projects, has led to the development of evaluation methodologies, similar to MSC in philosophy, which fall under the participatory approach umbrella (Bamberger, 2000), which also bring evaluation analysis and learning back to community members themselves. For example, *role play* can be used to improvise and act out sometimes difficult to vocalize impacts/changes within the community. Gender roles and gender dynamics may emerge through exaggerated improvisation, and discussion afterwards can help to clarify learnings. *Photovoice* uses photography to bring insights from the perspective of the community, whereby community members are asked to record 'before' and 'after' changes and describe their photos. This methodology brings forth perceptions beyond the imagination of outside evaluators. An associated approach, *participatory video*, brings community stakeholders together to make their own film, visualizing complex issues for dialogue about what has changed.

Achieving Better Community Development (ABCD) and the associated Learning, Evaluation and Planning in community development (LEAP) were designed as participatory planning and evaluation tools to plan and evaluate community development in particular contexts in the United Kingdom (Barr and Hashagen, 2000; Barr and Dailly (2008). ABCD is a broad framework used for planning, evaluating and learning from community development approaches and interventions. Suggesting the ultimate outcome is a healthy community (one which is satisfying, sustainable and equitable), ABCD usefully points to a theory of what happens in community development and how to measure the changes. A key working principle advocates that evaluation should be an integral element of community development. ABCD expects attention be given to evaluating the empowerment of communities and the changes in the quality of community life that result. LEAP is an adaptation of the ABCD framework into a planning and evaluation practice model which is participatory and based on self-evaluation rather than external evaluation. This model has particular merit, having been designed specifically for community development. However its limitations are its neighbourhood focus and the reality whereby in most funded community development initiatives, resources are committed in advance, based on previously selected areas, externally recommended targets and predetermined criteria.

Evaluation may be focused on the project outreach to the community and outcome dimensions, but equally on the internal structure of the community development support agency (process), and how they operate in terms of service provision to community stakeholders and how they communicate upwards to *influence policy*. Self-evaluation methods are gaining in popularity, particularly within larger organizations. For example *360-degree performance feedback* is a process through which feedback from colleagues,

subordinates and supervisor along with a self-evaluation by the employee (community workers) is gathered, taking a variety of points of view into account. For community development, community members should also be asked to provide feedback on community workers and funders.

We have presented here a range of methodologies and approaches for data collection and 'measuring' change. In the previous section, we examined criteria used and theory of change. It remains difficult to attribute cause and effect and employ tools which objectively determine results in community development. An important point remains: who sets the measurement indicators, be they perceptions or numeric data? As a professional discipline, it is inherent that community development should push for measuring processes towards change and learn from the quality of support provided by community workers to communities themselves. In light of these issues, the next section suggests fundamental principles for any evaluation in community development.

Towards appropriate evaluation in community development

The importance of defining what community development seeks to achieve as well as utilizing suitable tools to evaluate is the core focus of this article. Agreed definitions and clarity of direction is essential amongst all key stakeholders before we consider evaluation for and in community development. As pointed out by Babbie (2013, p. 363) 'whatever the agreed-on definitions, you must also achieve agreement on how the measurements will be made'. Our foundational starting points are not merely a question of methods, tools or evaluation criteria, but our theoretical stance. Community workers' ideological positions greatly influence and impact on what we do and subsequent outcomes including evidencing outcomes from community work.

Undoubtedly, any framework for articulating outcomes in community work should be rooted in community development principles, involving communities as active participants in an evaluation process. 'In the past, there was too much of doing things to communities. Now things are done with them, and that must include feedback on outcomes' (Henderson, 2005, p. 102). How can we include evaluation criteria (such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability) with people in the community suggesting questions for each criterion? What is the best way to employ these criteria to also assess the processes, principles and dynamics behind a programme rather than solely the results?

Community development as a theory of change
Community development is primarily concerned with change. The process of change may involve individuals, groups, alliances, institutions and other

stakeholder groups. Community development operates within a context of larger national policy frameworks, and it is necessary to document and learn how, if and when change occurs within this context. Rogers (2014) in her work for UNICEF explains how a *theory of change* visualizes how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts. The demonstration of the theory of change is an important building block for an evaluation wishing to understand and examine outcomes. The theory of change should form the basis for identifying data that need to be collected and how it should be analysed. Building on the principles of community development, in essence, community work processes and what it aspires to, should be the *theory of change*. Evaluation methods are subsequently chosen if they align to the theory of change, which implies that evaluation methods should map to community development principles and processes and make a useful contribution by generating information and accounts of the *what* and the *how* of doing the work. For sustained change, and because of the nature of community development work, intended outcomes ideally should be transformative for the community at large. Those working in community development, funders, communities themselves and also evaluators, must carefully consider how a 'funded' programme will support such causal processes for their programmes to remain relevant and impactful. This requires community development projects to be clear about what they are doing and why; where the project wants to go; what changes are required; and how any community development work can facilitate this change. In essence this entails acknowledgement that community development praxis is itself the catalyst and embeds the theory of change.

The EUCDN (2014) suggests that outcomes in community development should be visible at the levels of community; policy, structures and governance; and ideology which informs policy- and legislation-making. Evaluation should thus focus on indicators of improved quality of life – for example – physical changes such as improved (access to) community services and activities. Community leadership could be demonstrated through increased numbers of people involved in community activity or increased capacity to attract/generate funds. Other (effectiveness) indicators could establish whether communities feel their capacity to engage with decision-makers has been strengthened. Process indicators could include enhanced group dynamics, such as progress in groups working together and managing internal conflict. Facilitating empowerment is another desirable process to support, although confidence building pathway of individual community members will vary and be difficult to assess. However pathways towards empowerment can be documented, such as levels of conscientization amongst community members that 'things don't have to be this

way'. We can also observe increased involvement in decision-making committees, which conceivably indicates progress in projects becoming influential. Ultimately increasing control and asserting influence over the circumstances that require change will only become evident over time. It is community members who can best narrate how significant such change has been.

Fundamental principles

Outcomes for and in the community should be the core focus of an evaluation. However, to reach and recognize the end results of a community development project, a clear understanding and application of community work is necessary both in the interface with community members and to communicate up the line to those funding projects.

If outcomes are the essence of what evaluations are seeking to measure, of critical note is outcomes from whose perspective? Community members? Community development workers? Funders? Community members themselves are not a homogenous group with differing perspectives on reality, various needs/interests and contrasting views of how change could or should come about. Importantly, and bearing their differences in mind, community members' perceptions of outcomes should be central. This involves community members engaging in developing research questions themselves, designing the methodologies to be used in the research and analysing the research findings. Those at the centre of communities may also work with 'outsiders' or evaluators as colleagues with different skills to offer. The idea of mutual learning is at the heart of these processes, with communities in control and decisions made by agreement or consensus.

Learning is central to any evaluation and essential in community development where 'critical reflection and transformative action are not separate processes: they are inextricably integrated as a unity of praxis' (Ledwith and Springett, 2010, p. 24). Evaluation should offer insight into an initiative so as to enable reflection that assists in the identification of pathways towards future change. Recommendations emanating from the evaluation should be linked to evaluation findings whether qualitative or quantitative, outlining who is responsible for the next steps and in what time frame. Active participation in monitoring and evaluation, including analysing data and describing concerns should be core to – rather than alongside – the process of community development evaluation and can in itself lead to community empowerment. This also includes that communities receive the evaluation results – ideally in varied formats. Too often communities are consulted and researched by external agents without hearing the conclusions of the evaluation. This should not happen in a community development evaluation process.

Monitoring and evaluation should be built in to the design of the project; therefore it should be planned with funding allocated from the outset – not as an optional add-on. Monitoring throughout the lifespan of the project (by the community and project staff) and midway evaluation are important as reflection and analysis tools in order to shape the rest of the project. Another issue relates to the use of the information outside the project. Who owns evaluation information? These and other ethical dimensions – which are standard concerns in any research – should also be applied to evaluation research. It should not be taken for granted that community workers are ethical without consideration. This includes when evaluation generates criticisms of an intervention. Anonymity, confidentiality and other standard ethical issues need careful attention.

As argued earlier, too often evaluations concentrate at the local level, focusing on a specific location or groups of people. To maximize its trans-formational potential, community work evaluation must reflect issue-based work with a broader geographical and transformative agenda. This requires an evaluation framework that looks beyond local neighbourhoods to struc-tural change (which can be better processes, systems or services) or how a project changed the relationships between community members and people in positions of power. In this context, qualitative and quantitative method-ologies are not mutually exclusive and antagonistic paradigms. Combining both quantitative and qualitative methods as a mixed-method approach presents a way forward to demonstrate changes in different ways (Greene and Caracelli, 1997 Creswell, 2012). Evaluators may still need to sharpen their approach and to soften evaluation methods to complement other indicators. Qualitative evaluation methods must have a clear data analysis process (data must be coded and combined into thematic areas), and results presented in a coherent manner.

Finally, those interested in improving evaluation and maximizing the potential impact of any community development intervention should also turn their eye to professional formation processes as well including training in monitoring and evaluation. Levels of effectiveness in both areas are dependent on levels of competence; therefore any focus on measuring outcomes requires a focus on making sure that the intervention has the capacity to lead to meaningful outcomes. This has implications for the professional status of community workers and associated education and training processes, including employment requirements.

Conclusion

With cuts to community development initiatives globally, time is of essence to demonstrate what community work can achieve. Evaluation can be

challenging for community workers, communities and those who fund such interventions. Whilst each may have different starting points, reaching common ground in agreeing and implementing models for demonstrating impact has the potential to benefit all. Evaluation in community development depends on this clarity of purpose and processes, which requires an explicit theory of change of how an intervention is likely or understood to contribute to the intended outcomes.

Describing impact and outcome will continue to be challenging where 'social problems are inter-dependent and require integrated, multi-objective, multi-strategy responses' (Lane and Henry, 2001, p. 220). As a relatively new discipline which seeks to make a difference in addressing complex problems, community development needs to convince others and argue more effectively for what works. Whilst differences will exist in what and how to measure, as well as the appropriate methods to evaluate, wishing these tensions away or ignoring the demand for evidence from funders is not useful. Keeping community stakeholders at the centre of discussion on what to measure is fundamental.

Evaluation offers an opportunity for learning what change communities value and want. It offers communities a structure to report with possibilities to make recommendations for the next steps. It necessitates creative evaluators who are able to adapt their methodologies to the context at hand and innovative funding bodies who are willing to understand that change is not linear and results can be unexpected. All involved also need to believe that solutions to complex and challenging problems are both possible and within our grasp.

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