

WHAT IS COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING?

Community capacity can be seen as the capacity of the people in communities to participate in actions based on community interests, both as individuals and through groups, organisations and networks. It is not primarily about their ability to act in their personal, family or employers' interest, which are catered for in other spheres. However, many of the same skills are involved, and people who are active in the community invariably benefit in other ways as well.

The actions people and groups take can broadly be described as Community Activity. This can be divided into three types of activity:

- Action to build social capital: building relationships, trust, shared norms and networks. It involves people taking part in community initiatives, groups and organisations, and those groups communicating with the wider population as volunteers, members and participants.
- Delivering services: these can either be autonomous services provided by communities, or specialist services provided by community or voluntary groups, controlled by contracts or service level agreements with public agencies.
- Involvement in governance: representing the interests of all local people or of particular groups in influencing decisions that affect the quality of local life.

Community capacity building is defined as:

Activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills and abilities of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their communities.

It is helpful to see community capacity building as three main types of activity:

- Developing skills - learning and training opportunities for individuals and groups, and sharing through networks and mutual support, to develop skills, knowledge and confidence.
- Developing structures – developing the organisational structures and strengths of community groups, communities of interest and networks.
- Developing support – developing the availability of practical support to enable the development of skills and structures.

Community capacity building is normally undertaken to achieve a specific purpose, whereas the community development process provides the wider context. The key purpose of community development work is 'collectively to bring about social change

and justice, by working with communities (those that can be defined geographically and/or those defined by interest) to.....

- Identify their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities
- Plan, organise and take action
- Evaluate the effectiveness and impact of action.

.....all in ways which challenge oppression and tackle inequalities' (source: National Occupational Standards for Community Development