Unlocking Assets within the Community

What Are Assets?

In taking forward any community action, planning or prioritising it is important to consider the range of assets within the community. This must include a community's assets in the widest sense. Tangible assets are those we can see, and intangible assets are those we can't see, but which are often crucial to the wellbeing of people and communities.

Assets can be grouped under the following headings:

- **Financial** – Financial capital plays an important role in the economy, enabling other types of capital to be owned and traded
- **Built** – Fixed assets which facilitate the livelihood or well-being of the community
- **Social** – Features of social organisation such as networks, norms of trust that facilitate co-operation for mutual benefit, includes a sub-set of spiritual capital (that form of social capital that links to religion/ spirituality) Bonding, bridging social capital
- **Human** – People's health, knowledge, skills and motivation. Enhancing human capital can be achieved through education and training
- **Natural** – Landscape and any stock or flow of energy and material that produces goods and services.
- **Resources** – Renewable and non-renewable materials.
- **Cultural** – Shaping how we see the world, what we take for granted and what we value.
- **Political** – The ability of a community to influence the distribution and use of resources

Information sourced from Appreciating Assets report by IACD and Carnegie UK Trust.

Rural and remote areas have a real advantage in natural assets, both in terms of landscape, environment, and natural resources-led renewables. There are also many examples of rural community experience in management and ownership of land and land-assets demonstrating social enterprise approaches which have unlocked the potential from those assets for community benefit.

In terms of Human Assets, it is often more difficult for people to see their skills, knowledge or experience as being of value, yet this is the 'core' element of unlocking assets within the community. People are the core asset of communities and their individual skills when used together will be the key to accomplishing projects.

Empowering local residents through encouraged and valued involvement in seeing their contribution to the wider benefit and the shared ambition of the community, results in greater numbers of participants, and retention as well as shared ownership for delivering action.

Inclusion of young people as an asset is essential for succession planning but also to engage young people in creating local opportunities to ensure the retention of youth population in rural and remote areas, and reduce the out-migration of young people. Young people also bring digital skills which can assist with engagement, planning and delivery as well as wider communication.

Why Are Our Communities Assets Important?

Considering what assets we have available within the community can be an important first step for enterprising solutions. This can assist in identifying the resources available and how these can be used to deliver community benefit.

Often it is often easier for people to highlight the elements within their community that they are not happy with, however having a better understanding of the strengths and assets will make it easier to see how these can be utilised to address the needs identified.

This can also provide greater optimism for change, seeing issues as solvable and therefor harnessing greater support in taking forward plans. There are some useful resources on considering community assets from the University of Kansas, Community Toolbox Resources.

Activities

Activity 1: Identifying Assets which can lead to Action

This activity works well in assisting the community to consider what assets are available within the local community.

Have separate flipcharts or sheets of paper, one for each of the kind of Asset headings: Financial, Built, Social, Human, Natural, Resources, Cultural, and Political.

This can be done in a larger group if people feel confident. In order to ensure everyone gets an opportunity to contribute, you may want to get people to write down their ideas on post-it notes, or discuss in pairs and then feed into the flipcharts. This will include people who might initially be hesitant or shy to call out in a group.

At the end of the session, the group can discuss how they feel about what they have jointly created. Using different coloured markets can be a useful way of highlight the different types of assets, and also reinforce the attractiveness and diversity of the emerging picture of your community.

It is useful to get the group to reflect and see if they are surprised about how many assets or positive attributes their community have, and can draw on.

Activity 2: Identify the Skills, Knowledge, and Expertise in Your Community

This is the aspect of considering assets that people find most difficult. It is therefore important to put some extra time and encouragement to consider the range of Human assets available within the community.

In pairs or small groups, find out 2-3 things that your neighbours are good at, and then consider how these skills/experiences could be assets for collective action.

Note: You do not need to have a merchant banker to have good financial management skills, someone managing the finances for a busy household, or who has experience from keeping the accounts for a community group should also consider these. Similarly, someone who is a good communicator might not see that in themselves, or a good networker. It is the role of the one partner to draw out the skills, knowledge and expertise from the other and vice versa as many people don't feel comfortable stating their own strengths.

Once you have taken time in pairs to draw out these attributes, these can be fed into a note of the collective strengths. This can again, provide an important opportunity to reflect on the collective assets within the community as a positive.

Within this process, or as you progress with action, it is useful to reflect on the Human Assets you have available within your community and if there are any elements of skills or expertise that are missing from the collective group that would be of assistance in progressing plans, identify who (through wider networks and stakeholders) may be able to bring those.

Maximising Community Assets to Deliver Social Enterprise Solutions

Social enterprise as an approach to utilising and managing community assets for community benefit is a method which has been widely adopted in the rural context.

Physical/tangible assets such as community forests, renewable infrastructure, halls, etc. all provide an opportunity to deliver community benefit, both from the income generated from their operation as well as the operating model, which can include employing people with barriers, providing employment and training opportunities, attracting people to live and work in the area or sustaining services vital for community resilience.

Similarly, intangible assets such as culture and heritage can be unlocked to maximise community benefits, such as creating visitor resources, services or facilities which generate income for the local community and provide employment and training opportunities.

The Assets for Social Enterprise Assessment Tool provides an opportunity to review your community asset and consider options with regards to developing social enterprise approaches as a response.

Case Studies

- ➢ **Bearing Fruit, Development Trust Association & Carnegie UK** *(written in English)*
- Good case studies in an asset based approach to local development
- Prioritise asset purchases and existing development based upon best-value for the local community. Do not impulsively purchase an asset because it is cheap, but instead consider the long term community plan goals, visions and priorities.
- The material emphasizes the importance of utilizing and developing community skills and using networking to gain expertise which may not have been otherwise available or considered. In networking, the skills base available for success is wider, allowing for more possible solutions to problems.