

# The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland's Approach to Measuring Change across its Development Programmes

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*The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland has developed a number of useful and transferrable approaches to monitoring and evaluation over the last decade. This short article provides a snapshot of a range of these models, methodologies and types of indicators.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Community development is an important methodology in any society, but there are added dimensions in societies either embroiled in or emerging from conflict. In Northern Ireland, community development approaches can and should promote positive community cohesion and peacebuilding. However, programmes seeking to have a long-term impact on local peacebuilding and community development cannot impose a predetermined set of rigid outputs or an inflexible approach upon local communities and expect to achieve results. In addition, community development and peacebuilding work in areas of weak community infrastructure need to be community led and this requires an investment in people, as well as their participation in measuring the changes which have taken place. Progressive work must include all sides of the community affected by the issues involved. To effect real change on these issues, support programmes must focus on outcomes, adopt a flexible (and risk-taking) approach and proactively seek to include the most marginalised voices in the process. The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) has developed a number of models and tools for measuring change in local communities based on these principles.

A persistent problem for community development and peacebuilding programmes lies in identifying exactly what they have achieved - what change can be attributed to their initiative and efforts. In part, this is connected to the

fact that area-based programmes are not experiments where the subjects can be isolated from all other influences. Unrealistic expectations that community development can effect structural change in a short period of time cannot be met and the socio-economic profile of an area may thus remain unchanged despite significant programme success. In addition, in areas of heightened community tensions, there is sometimes also a problem of attributing successes where confidentiality remains paramount while the issues themselves are still “live”.

Typically, evaluations of community-based programmes seek to measure activities and easily quantifiable outputs, thus capturing what is easiest to measure. The bigger questions, such as how much development has actually taken place or whether the community has changed for the better, tend to be ignored because of the measurement problems set out above.

The difference between peacebuilding and community development, as well as the relationship between the two processes, must also be continually evaluated. Community development efforts can accompany peacebuilding efforts in a given setting and, in many instances, the two kinds of activities and goals are congruent. But some conceptual distinction needs to be preserved, otherwise peacebuilding becomes ‘any good thing’ or, conversely, all development can be justified as necessary for peace. Both assumptions are misleading. When peacebuilding and community development are not distinguishable, important factors underlying the root causes of conflict may not be addressed. Furthermore, “A line needs to be drawn between peacebuilding and maximising the various levels of social, economic and political development possible in a given society. Otherwise, if the term ‘peacebuilding’ becomes a synonym for all the positive things we would want to include in development in order to reduce any and all of a society’s ills, it becomes useless for guiding knowledge-gathering and practical purposes.”<sup>1</sup>

## **COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION AND THE CHANGE MATRIX APPROACH**

From 2002 to 2013, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland delivered two phases of the Communities in Transition Programme (funded by the International Fund for Ireland and Atlantic Philanthropies). Communities in Transition (CIT) proactively targeted communities where a lack of previous support and development was compounded by a range of community tensions. The Communities in Transition Programme developed an empowerment evaluation model (*the Change Matrix*) to enable local communities involved in community development and peacebuilding work to achieve four main tasks:

- To capture the **baseline** picture in a geographic community, from which to measure all attributable change (including progress and barriers);
- To **evaluate** the impact of a programme or project on a set of relevant indicators (at a particular point in time as well as on the whole);
- To establish which of the indicators and programme objectives are a **priority** for local groups and the programme deliverers/staff/funders (and whether these priorities are similar or different for these groups);
- And to measure how **changeable** participants and programme deliverers expect each element to be. In other words, while a certain aspect of a programme may be a high priority, participants and deliverers may recognise that it may not be possible to have a significant impact upon certain elements within a relatively short period of time (e.g. quality of life, deprivation, the legacy of the conflict etc). Separating out the changeability of each element makes planning, delivery and evaluation more realistic and achievable for local groups and programme developers.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Change Matrix approach to evaluation was developed to incorporate these four tasks through the first Communities in Transition Programme, it has now been adapted and applied across a range of CFNI's development and support programmes (see below).

During the first CIT Programme, it was found necessary to ensure that:

(1) The process was driven by participants, requiring an **Empowerment Evaluation** approach to be employed. Empowerment evaluation employs a range of methodologies, but has an unambiguous value orientation – to help people improve projects using a form of self-evaluation and reflection. Participants conduct their own evaluations; an outside evaluator often serves as a coach or additional facilitator (critical friend) depending on internal programme capabilities. It is necessarily a collaborative group activity, not an individual pursuit. An evaluator does not, and cannot, empower anyone; people empower themselves. The process is fundamentally democratic in the sense that it invites (if not demands) participation, openly examining issues of concern to the entire group.

(2) The **outcomes the evaluation seeks to capture should be directly derivable from the programme objectives** - the achievements the evaluation seeks to measure should be directly focused on the nature of the programme.

CIT was about integrating community development and peacebuilding practices and accelerating the development of communities that:

- are lacking in infrastructure;
- have been largely ignored by mainstream programmes;
- have experienced some form of community tensions, particularly in terms of residual paramilitarism, sectarianism or difficult relations with other communities;
- have problematic relationships with statutory providers/local politicians, and;
- while not always among the most deprived, are considerably less than affluent.<sup>3</sup>

**(3) Changes in these dimensions can be best captured by asking the people involved to rate their importance (priority for the project), the level of difficulty in actually making change occur in that dimension (changeability) and how much change has taken place as the result of programme activity.** The views of projects and the CIT staff who worked with them were each checked against the other.

The purpose of this type of evaluation is not to provide an 'end of term' report on the work of CIT or any other programme. It is to work with the programme to elicit as much learning as possible and to identify lessons for similar or future programmes. CIT presents itself as an innovative model of community action, particularly relevant in a region with a legacy of conflict and where community development resources and organisation have been historically concentrated in particular spaces. The use of social need indicators alone to target resources has, if anything, reinforced this concentration. CIT selected areas of significant underdevelopment of community organisation, but where the legacy of the conflict is apparent, and sought to build something entirely new. In addition, it employed a novel evaluation strategy – ongoing, with an interactive relationship between internal and external evaluations, and seeking for big picture outcomes. In short, it sought to combine innovative practice with a novel form of evaluation.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this, evidence emerged through CIT of the ways in which the evaluation activity encouraged projects (and the people who worked with them) to:

- Think about **what was important** (prioritise) and concentrate activity;
- Think about what was **difficult to change** and what would be the value of attempting to change the most difficult issues;
- Think about what **changes had actually taken place** as a result of project activity.<sup>5</sup>

While this evaluation approach generates a wealth of quantitative and qualitative data and provides for comparisons on many levels, the really important issue for effectively measuring change in this context is to get projects engaged in the three processes outlined above. The combination of tools used to evaluate the CIT Programmes has effectively done just this. The Change Matrix model, combined with capturing the learning at the local and programme levels provides an overall picture of what has been achieved across the local projects, how this has occurred, what barriers have prevented progress in some areas and what work still remains to be done. Adopting this evaluation methodology provides opportunities for local participants, programme developers/deliverers and funders to more adequately assess the rationale, impact and sustainability of their work. Indeed, effectively measuring change at the local and programme levels is one critical element towards the development of evidence-driven community development and peacebuilding policy.<sup>6</sup>

As stated above, this methodology for measuring change has now been carried out through a number of CFNI's development programmes, each of which has different aims and objectives. Differences in the approaches used, as well as the individual indicators developed to suit the programmes' intended outcomes, will be the focus of the rest of this short article.

The Communities in Transition Programme objectives were to assist in the creation/development of some form of community organisation that:

1. brings together all groups in the community (**inclusive**);
2. does not seek to appropriate all forms of local power (**pluralist**);
3. listens to, and speaks for, the community as a whole (**voice**);
4. focuses on helping weaker community members (**reach**);
5. encourages the involvement of many community members (**participation**);
6. moderates conflicts within the community (**conciliates**);
7. builds relationships with other communities (**engages**);
8. works with statutory and other providers (**advocates**);
9. identifies and campaigns around community-defined needs (**develops**).

In short, the programme did three things: first, help develop a particular form of community organisation; second, encourage the adoption of specific kinds of local process; third, assist in developing strategies to tackle local social need. It did so whilst fully acknowledging some of the key limitations of local action, specifically that structural change actively under-develops vulnerable communities and marginalises their members (community development cannot solve structural poverty). Indeed, even the issues around which community development has a practical relevance can take a very long time to exhibit any kind of change<sup>7</sup>.

The first step in assessing programme impact was to define a set of ‘change dimensions’ that naturally emerged from these nine programme objectives. This was done via discussions with projects and the programme staff team rather than externally imposed by the evaluator or the funders. That process generated the following matrix<sup>8</sup>:

<b>Programme Objective</b>	<b>Change Dimension</b>
<b>Inclusive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Isolation</b></li> <li>• <b>Alienation</b></li> </ul>
<b>Pluralist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gatekeeping</b></li> </ul>
<b>Voice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Community Confidence</b></li> </ul>
<b>Reach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Quality of Life</b></li> <li>• <b>Community Safety</b></li> </ul>
<b>Participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Community Organisation</b></li> </ul>
<b>Conciliates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Group Tensions</b></li> </ul>
<b>Engages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Impact of the Conflict</b></li> <li>• <b>Racism</b></li> <li>• <b>Sectarianism</b></li> <li>• <b>Interface</b></li> <li>• <b>Overt Cultural Expression</b></li> </ul>
<b>Advocates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Funding</b></li> <li>• <b>Relationships with Agencies/ Politicians</b></li> </ul>
<b>Develops</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Access to Services</b></li> <li>• <b>Community Facilities</b></li> <li>• <b>Environmental Issues</b></li> <li>• <b>Sustainability</b></li> </ul>

Using these dimensions, the change matrices were completed with each CIT2 project by the current author. This process utilises Nominal Group Technique (NGT), a qualitative method that can be used to illustrate more detailed interactions, factors and circumstances to supplement quantitative measurements of gross or net impact. NGT is designed to draw on participant knowledge rather than opinions (the subject matter of focus groups). It first

elicits individual responses about outcomes and the means to achieve them and then through collective discussion focuses down on those areas which are deemed to have highest priority amongst the group. The method then seeks to facilitate a discussion about what changes have occurred as a result of project activities, the benefits or costs involved and the means to achieve greater positive impact. It thus allows for understanding of policy impact and social phenomena from the perspective of individuals and groups who experience it in specific social contexts and is recommended by HM Treasury as an appropriate tool in policy evaluation. The external evaluator, Dr Mike Morrissey, undertook a similar exercise with CFNI staff that supported the CIT2 projects. The result was a set of estimates, from both projects and workers, of: how important these elements were; how difficult it would be to bring about improvement, and how much change was actually achieved.

Completing this exercise across twelve local areas, as well as with CFNI staff, over nineteen indicators, each scored on five dimensions, provided a wealth of data to be analysed across the CIT2 Programme:

- First, it is possible to compare the local group's priorities with the priorities of the programme deliverer (CFNI).
- Second, looking at an individual project, it is possible to plot their individual progress on each indicator throughout the life of the programme.
- Third, it is possible to show how each of the groups progressed against a single indicator over time. This can reveal that some groups and communities don't always follow a positive linear path against some indicators. For example, a local event or setback can mean that a group's progress shows a "blip" or negative dip against an indicator at a certain point in time. This highlights two important points:
  - First, that it is necessary to look at the qualitative notes provided during the NGT sessions where all the groups were scored in order to identify individual local reasons for progress or setbacks.
  - Second, that this model of evaluation allows for an honest account of local issues. Unlike many evaluations that only seek to paint the work of a local group or programme in a positive light and only highlight the progress made, this type of evaluation seeks to identify not only local successes, but also to uncover the elements of local community development and peacebuilding where there is still work to be done. The Change Matrix Model seeks to examine the wider context within which a local community development group is operating in order to evaluate projects where predetermined outcomes are frequently an impossibility.<sup>9</sup>

## **THE CREATING SPACE FOR LEARNING AND SHARING PROJECT**

With financial support from the International Fund for Ireland through its Community Bridges Programme, the Creating Space for Learning and Sharing Project (CSLSP) began as a pilot project with 12 communities selected to participate in 2008. 18 more communities became involved in the second phase of the programme in 2010, in addition to an extension of the work with the original 12 communities. Four more communities became involved in the third phase of the programme in 2013. In addition, 2013 saw the addition of the Community Leadership Programme, as well as a focused and intensive series of Cluster Events.

These 34 groups and communities (a mix of locally based groups and communities of interest) each identified a peacebuilding issue (or issues) to tackle in their local areas. They were each provided with a small budget and the support of a mentor to work on this local project. As it was focused exclusively on peacebuilding work, CSLSP also provided a further opportunity to build on the innovative evaluation work developed through Communities in Transition.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the basic evaluation which captures the groups' thoughts on the model, key elements of the programme and capacity building in terms of issues such as networking, lobbying and influencing, the Change Matrix approach was adapted to measure the impact on peacebuilding at the local level and across the programme as a whole. This model included measuring progress against key indicators throughout the course of the programme to plot each group's starting point, journey and outcomes, along with any 'triggers' that led to significant progress or setbacks along the way. The six key indicators being monitored were:

- **Working with others.** This includes cross community, cross border and good relations issues. It also includes collaborative working between different groups or communities, as well as improved working relationships between statutory and other external agencies.
- **Working on shared or contested space.** This includes not only physical, urban interfaces, but also examples of contested rural space, developing neutral venues and maximising local inclusion through shared resources.
- **Intracommunity relations.** This can mean intracommunity political/paramilitary conflict (such as feuds, mainstream v. non-mainstream political groupings etc.), but also includes issues within a community such as intergenerational work and tackling antisocial behaviour.

- **Dealing with the past.** This indicator focuses on explicit work on “legacy of the conflict” issues, including (but not limited to) work with ex-combatants, victims groups, storytelling, joint remembrance projects, arts projects seeking to replace contentious emblems etc.
- **Intercultural awareness raising.** This includes cultural learning, sharing, increased understanding and awareness raising between the two main traditions, as well as within and between minority cultures.
- **Attitudinal change.** This includes changes in perceptions, stereotypes and mindsets held by individuals, groups and communities and can also be measured in terms of how changes in attitudes have led to changes in ways of working.<sup>11</sup>

Information relating to all of these indicators was collected for all local groups and projects throughout the course of the programme and was presented along with the more standard evaluation material, case studies and longitudinal studies. In addition, the evaluation of CSLSP led to the development of a practical *Peacebuilding Toolkit*. This toolkit drew on the lessons and experiences from the CSLSP groups, mentors and staff and focused on the Why? What? Who? and How? of local peacebuilding work.

## VITAL SIGNS

Vital Signs® is a considerably different approach to the other programmes detailed here, in that it is part of an international research and development initiative and, hence, seeks to measure change at a higher level. Vital Signs has been successfully run by the Community Foundations of Canada nationally since 2006 and has since been adapted for other communities around the world. The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland launched its first Vital Signs research in October 2013, along with seven other UK Community Foundations who have conducted similar research in their own communities. A core set of themes and indicators was agreed between the eight Foundations who participated in the first year, in order to allow for some comparisons:

- Labour Market
- Tackling Disadvantage and Exclusion
- Housing
- Safety
- Environment
- Education and Skills
- Arts and Culture
- Strong Communities

- Health and Well-Being
- Economic Performance.

Vital Signs uses a number of different methods and sources of data through which it identifies the priority issues and trends emerging. This includes a range of administrative data, but more importantly, also includes original local and regional research and first-hand reports, identifying a range of needs, concerns and aspirations of our local communities.<sup>12</sup> For example, over the summer of 2013, two surveys were circulated throughout the community sector: One short survey of individual residents with ten questions on the Vital Signs themes (over 1000 responses from individuals have now been returned); and one short survey of local community and voluntary organisations with ten questions on the priorities and issues currently facing the sector (over 500 responses from a range of community and voluntary organisations have now been returned).

The first Northern Ireland issue of *Vital Signs* focused on the regional and District Council levels across the ten themes. *Vital Signs Northern Ireland 2014* will have a special focus on Local Government Reform and, thus, will focus on the current District Council across these ten themes, including new surveys, case studies and focus groups.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE APPROACH TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

The learning arising from three Bill of Rights Programmes and a pilot Social Justice Programme enabled CFNI to develop a new model that combines social justice work with community development practice. Funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, CFNI launched the new Social Justice Approach to Community Development Programme in September 2011. This new Programme enables groups to assess how they identify and meet needs in their local areas, how they might tackle injustices and how they might become more inclusive and accountable. Alongside looking at local relationships, it supports groups to look at their relationships with “others” – be they neighbouring communities, the “other” community, new communities within Northern Ireland or agencies and service providers. It also supports groups to build or capitalise on relationships with politicians and other service providers.

Although there is a detailed evaluation methodology accompanying this programme (see summary below), the model itself is a useful tool for measuring change within groups, within communities and relating to relationships with statutory agencies, institutions and policy. *A Power Analysis toolkit* outlining this process in detail is currently being developed by CFNI and Paddy Logue.

The process is based on groups critically reflecting upon:

- **Internal relations** – within their local committees and evaluating if more effective ways of working can be developed. This seeks to look at how the committee works in a practical sense. Moreover, it aims to get groups to explore why they were set up, what was/is their purpose, is this purpose still the main focus or has this changed and, if so, why. This part of the process provides space for reflection on who is represented in the group and, importantly, who is not, why they are not and what can be done to change this. It also gets groups to critically assess who are the powerful voices in the group, who dominates, controls or takes responsibility for the group's work and, significantly, how the group can strive to become more representative and democratic.
- **Community relations** – how the group works within their local area and how they feel they are perceived. It is about how these perceptions can be changed and how they can work more cohesively to ensure positive community relations and more participation in community activity. It is also about how the group perceives others. There is a need to critically reflect on their perceptions and/or exclusion of other groups and other areas.
- **External relations** – the group's relations with other groups, particularly groups from neighbouring (and "other") communities, how they perceive other groups/areas and how they feel they are perceived by others. This is about reflecting on how others are engaged or excluded and how the group could challenge, change or support better external relations. Importantly, having looked at the internal relations, there should be a guided emphasis to ensure that groups don't play a 'blame game' against others, but rather that they analyse their own positions, their own prejudices and their own perceptions in engaging with others. More positive outcomes may be achieved if honest conversations are enabled in a safe space. This may help groups evaluate whether they can develop improved means of communicating their needs and sharing resources.
- **Strategic relations** – the group's relationships with statutory and voluntary agencies and elected representatives, in order to create a strong and participative way of working. It is critical that the group understands the roles and responsibilities of others, including duty bearers, so that realistic expectations develop.<sup>13</sup>



communities, but also to assess whether the model (the social justice approach to community development) works better for some groups/communities/issues than for others.

Finally, in addition to measuring change to ascertain what positive (or negative) developments have occurred at the local (and wider) level in relation to community development, peacebuilding, quality of life or social justice, the ultimate objective of many of these programmes is to have an influence on policy. The Social Justice Approach to Community Development model is currently being evaluated to reflect on its ability to identify relevant policy issues relating to a number of themes and in partnership with other CFNI development programmes. These include:

- The recession, welfare reform and austerity (Communities in Action Programme);
- The changing nature of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the legacy of the conflict (Peace Impact Programme);
- Local government reform and community planning (Causeway Communities Engagement Programme);
- The changing nature and needs of the community sector in Northern Ireland, including the diminishing sources of support (all programmes).

In order to have an influence on any of these higher level policy themes, it is clearly necessary to have accurate means for measuring change and demonstrating impact.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lund, 2003

<sup>2</sup> Morrissey et al. 2012

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Healy and Feenan, 2013

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Healy, 2013

<sup>13</sup> Healy & O'Prey, 2011

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