Australian Government

Building inclusive and resilient communities

AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL INCLUSION BOARD
JUNE 2009

The following principles have been developed to help governments, communities and other organisations contribute to strong, inclusive and resilient communities by building resources and capacity. There are also some ideas for how to implement these principles.

Resilient communities are able to integrate their resources and capability to respond positively to crises and adapt to pressures. **Resources** that support resilience include economic resources and development, social capital, information and communication systems. **Capability** includes skills, motivation and leadership and competence.

The integration of different resources and capabilities allows a community to respond to a changing environment, deal with crises and recover, innovate and capitalise on economic and social opportunities. Resources and capacity can be integrated through reciprocal links, cooperative decision making and supportive relationships between individuals, families and organisations, including government and non-government agencies, community organisations and the business sector.

Resilient communities are equipped to help themselves and are also able to reach out and support one another in times of crisis - this has been seen in the recent Victorian bushfires.

The resources, capability and integration of a community are best strengthened continuously, not just in times of crisis or stress. Existing community and government activities, services and governance arrangements provide opportunities to work in ways that strengthen and support communities to be more resilient. Development – whether it is new development, redevelopment in established communities or rebuilding after natural disaster such as bushfire or flood – offers a unique opportunity to plan social and physical infrastructure to better support communities.

Ideas for building inclusive and resilient communities

Depending on their size, location and history, different communities and their organisations, such as local government, will have different resources and structures they can draw on. These ideas are designed as a menu rather than a prescription, from which to select ideas some ideas that fit your community.

Understand the community in terms of its composition, strengths, opportunities, vulnerabilities and attitudes

- Do a community strengths and needs analysis, to make sure the physical, economic and social assets and risks are known and understood, what the community needs and how the needs can best be met. Depending on the circumstances, this process can be comprehensive and in-depth, or fast and focused, but will still be valuable.

- Involve the community in the assessment of assets, risks and needs as widely as possible. The social dimension is very important. Issues to consider include: population characteristics; social organisation; community history; lifestyle; resources; attitudes and values; strengths; vulnerabilities and community capacities.

- Consider the relationships between different groups and organisations – where are relationships already strong? Are there connections that should be made or strengthened?

- Consider how the community or region compares with others on critical factors affecting health, wellbeing and response potential.

- Revisit the assessment from time to time, to take account of changes and to assess progress. Do this more often if the community or environment is changing quickly.

- Think about potential risks and crises, and plan for them. Risks might be environmental, social or economic – but these domains are interrelated. Think about whether a risk in one area may be connected to risks or vulnerabilities in another.

Embrace diversity

- Recognise that diversity can bring different perspectives and knowledge to the community and think about how to include diverse communities in planning, decision-making and action.

- Identify services or programs that are inaccessible or exclude certain groups in the community and develop ways of making them more inclusive.

- Divisions and differences within a community are almost inevitable. They may present challenges but do not necessarily prevent the development of vital and resilient communities. Consider the different perspectives and knowledge of divided communities. See if there are ways to cater to different needs and aspirations, rather than forcing a consensus or disenfranchising some sections of the community.

Promote community leadership to set priorities and promote a sense of purpose

- Involve community members in decision-making processes and apply their insights and knowledge in planning, action, management and review.

- Leadership may be formal (elected or appointed leaders) or informal (leaders who are recognised in the community for their strength, judgement or expertise but may not hold a position) – both forms of leadership are important to recognise and cultivate.

- The substance and style of decision-making by leaders is very important – genuine community involvement might require changes to decision-making and bureaucratic processes.

- Communicate decisions, plans and timetables for action to the whole community.

- Engage locals and use local resources, expertise, knowledge and skills where possible.

Build a strong and diverse local economy

- A strong local economy is a foundation for a resilient community. Resources, diversity, leadership, networks, learning and innovation and infrastructure are all elements of a resilient economy as well as a resilient community.

- Economic resources include access to equity capital, credit, human capital and expertise. Developing locally-controlled sources of finance and capital can help empower a community to build enterprise and employment opportunities.

- A resilient local economy has diverse businesses and employment opportunities, so that community wellbeing does not stand or fall according to the market fortunes of just one industry. Encourage the development of a diverse economy and emphasise the interdependency of local businesses in order to create economic security.

- Business innovation can build local economic diversity and autonomy, and can also help the local economy adapt to changing conditions.

- Physical, social and financial infrastructure all contribute to the strength of the local economy. Structures and networks to support enterprise development and business incubation or mentorship can also contribute to innovation and diversity.

Build strong networks and support

- Provide opportunities for people of all ages, cultural, language and socio-economic backgrounds and people living with a disability to participate in social and community networks and feel that they belong in their community.
  - Important networks include families and friends, religious, social, cultural and community organisations.
  - Networking can be supported through community meetings, cultural and sporting activities such as carnivals, festivals or fetes and involvement in various communities.
- Belief systems have been shown to enhance personal and community resilience, often by providing people with an additional sense of meaning and purpose in their everyday lives. As well as the many forms of organised religion, community ceremonies, ritual and observance can contribute to cohesion and resilience.
- Think about what support individuals and families might need to participate in wider networks and in social and economic activity – this might include counselling, affordable childcare, respite for carers and services for the elderly, refugees and people with a disability.
- Build networks among community leaders such as local councillors, parliamentarians, cultural and religious leaders, teachers and business leaders to share resources and knowledge.
- Networks involving government agencies, community organisations and commercial enterprises can encourage innovation, partnership and sharing of knowledge and experience.
- Look for opportunities for various organisations and businesses to work together to provide the services and facilities the community needs, rather than competing with one another.
- Promote volunteering, philanthropy and recognise the role of non-government and community organisations working in the community.

Promote learning and innovation

- Make extended use of school infrastructure for community purposes.
- With increasing emphasis on vocationally relevant education and training, consider making use of spare school capacity to involve students beyond usual school age, create training packages that combine TAFE/school/regional university resources suited to students of different age groups.
- Use school and community library staff and information resources to create community knowledge centres to back-up community need assessments and provide data in support of initiatives.
- Think about innovative ways that learning can be built into other community activities and made flexible to fit in with the other responsibilities and needs of the community including work, family and caring responsibilities.

Recognise the role of the physical environment and infrastructure

- In a place-based approach, the characteristics of the community and the location can be brought together in an integrated "person and place" approach that focuses on outcomes for people.
- In this context, the community and its needs should be in the centre of any development - involving the community in planning, selecting and designing and governing their physical and social infrastructure can be just as important as the facilities and services themselves.
- Flexible spaces and multipurpose facilities can meet diverse community needs, support networks through community events, meetings and gatherings; and support the delivery of new, unforseen or occasional services.
- Consider the needs of different client groups for flexible or multipurpose facilities, such as fenced, safe outdoor areas for children's activities and child care; access for the disabled or elderly; and suitability for amplified music and dancing for young people.
- Accessibility and availability and appropriateness of essential services, including public and community transport, is important to support participation by disadvantaged groups.
- Take opportunities offered by development or redevelopment to think about where facilities and services are located – things to consider might include:
  - Proximity or integration with existing hubs or centres of community activity, such as shopping centres and schools;
  - Can co-location allow facilities or resources (such as meeting rooms, outdoor spaces, office services) to be shared?
  - Can location maximise convenience and reduce travel for clients through walkability, proximity to public transport and co-location?
  - Can co-location support networks and encourage interaction among diverse groups in the community, such as the old and young, newly arrived and established communities and culturally and linguistically diverse communities?
- Promote healthy, active communities through appropriate, safe outdoor spaces.
- Involve the community in the design and use of the physical environment to build pride and a sense of belonging.

What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to 'bounce back' after negative experiences and to cope in unknown situations. It refers to individuals' capacity to withstand stress and adapt positively to change. Community resilience means the capacity of communities to respond positively to crises. It is the ability of a community to adapt to pressures and transform itself in a way which makes it more sustainable in the future. Rather than simply 'surviving' the stressor or change, a resilient community might respond in creative ways that fundamentally transform the basis of the community. Possible stressors include the broader political, economic, and physical environment influence, as well as communities' internal vulnerabilities.

Individuals and groups within communities will respond to challenges in different ways. For this reason, 'resilience' cannot be conceptualised as a discrete capability. Moreover, differences may mean that various groups are more or less resilient in particular situations. In particular, vulnerable social groups, such as the elderly or unemployed may have fewer resources to cope with a crisis. Poor communities are not only at greater risk in crises, due to lack of resources, but can be less successful at mobilising resources due to a lack of certain community capabilities.

What is Vulnerability?

Vulnerabilities are the components of a community which may weaken its ability to respond adaptively to a change. The relationship between resilience and vulnerability is debated. Some authors suggest that they are opposites (with a reduction in vulnerability, resilience increases) while others argue that the relationship is more complex. This is because a community can be both resilient and vulnerable and different communities are vulnerable and resilient to different challenges.

According to Maguire and Cartwright (see "Resources"), social assessment in the past has been approached from a framework of vulnerability rather than with a resilience approach. This focuses on identifying weaknesses and the imposing measures to overcome them – often a costly and lengthy process due to the changing threats posed to communities. A resilience-based approach, however, would focus on resources and capacities, through which communities manage change in a sustainable way. Given that providing support to people at risk of long-term disadvantage and assisting jobless families in disadvantaged locations are priorities for social inclusion, it is important to consider ways in which community resilience can be built to overcome vulnerabilities.

Characteristics of Resilient Communities

Resilient communities have a high level of social capital. That is, mutual trust, social norms, participation and social networks. Resilient communities also possess the necessary resources, such as strengths and abilities, required to overcome vulnerabilities and adapt positively to change.

Social Capital Characteristics

- Leadership is representative of the community, visionary and consensus-building
- Community members from all segments of the population are involved in significant community decisions and activities
- Social cohesion and a sense of community pride and optimism
- Community members embrace diversity
- Mutual trust and cooperation
- Altruism and supportive networks

Resource Characteristics

- Community competence, skills and education.
- Organisations in the community in collaborative working relationships.
- Economic development so that employment in the community is diversified and major employers in the community are locally owned.
- Infrastructure and support services suit the needs of the community in an equitable way

Examples

The following examples show how particular communities have worked to increase their resilience through a variety of means. The examples are grouped under some key resilience ideas, but do not exclusively relate to the idea under which they are listed. The most effective projects build resilience in a number of different ways simultaneously. Each of these examples is unique, creative and specifically tailored to the community in question, building on known strengths and overcoming vulnerabilities.

Promoting Innovation

Coolamon, NSW, is a town of 1650 people. Over the past few decades, the town's economy has significantly contracted due to farm amalgamations, changes in the global agricultural market, and the loss of local businesses to Wagga Wagga. In 2002, the town commissioned a state award-winning study and plan that identified opportunities for development based around its heritage and attractive outlook. With funding from the NSW Department of State and Regional Development, a Cultural and Economic Development Officer was employed and a steering committee established to develop a comprehensive plan to develop the town in a positive way. An annual event 'Coolamon on Display' was held to showcase Coolamon's businesses; recreational and cultural facilities; health and community services; education and childcare facilities, as an ideal environment to live, relax and play.

Coolamon faced further stressors due to the ongoing drought, but the community was able to adapt its programs to face this challenge. 'Coolamon on Display' was superseded by the 'Drought Breaking, Rain Making' and 'Seven Years Long, Still Hanging On' events, designed to raise the spirit of the local people. These and other 'community boosters,' together with a more refined cultural tourism approach again bucked the decline. Over the past 6 years, Coolamon's shop occupancy rate increased from 70% to almost 100% and there has been a six-fold increase in accommodation bookings. Community confidence has significantly increased, attracting 250 new residents to the town.

Fairfield, Iowa, experienced new growth due to community leadership focused on mobilising entrepreneurs. It was once a typical small rural town, at risk of economic decline and loss of population and services. However, the community is consciously building a culture of entrepreneurship. Existing businesses consciously encourage and mentor start-ups, passing on skills and advice to newer entrepreneurs. They hold monthly 'entrepreneurs boot camps' at which small businesses share skills. They have a 'CEO's Round Table for Peer Networking', and support from Iowa's Centre for Community Vitality. As a result, Fairfield has created 3000 jobs, has 60 companies headquartered there, and is ranked first in Iowa for income growth and philanthropy.

Recognising the role of the physical environment, infrastructure and resources

Community gardens fulfil a variety of important roles from neighbourhood renewal, providing shared spaces to health benefits, psychological well-being and environmental education (Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network, 2006). A Community Garden on the Waterloo Housing Estate in Sydney was researched by a team of UNSW academics from a range of disciplines and schools, based on a series of stakeholder interviews and focus groups with people from the Gardens. The researchers found that the Gardens had many benefits for gardeners and other tenants.

Embracing diversity

The City of Melbourne held meetings and focus groups with diverse community organisations, advocacy agencies and members of the community to assist in the development of its 2004 Multicultural Strategy. The community was invited to participate by advertising placed in the ethnic media and local papers, and by direct mail, email and fact sheets translated into nine languages.

In Nymagee, NSW, a biannual outback music festival has attracted international artists and increased the prospects for tourism and economic diversification in the district. In 1998 the community, which numbered 35, got together to work out how to build the population to ensure Nymagee had a future. One of the ideas was to stage an outback music festival to raise the profile of the town and district, to attract tourists and ultimately residents. The first Nymagee Outback Music Festival was held in 1999 and from 2000 has occurred every second year. It's a feast of culture in the country, combining live entertainment and arts with new and emerging local and visiting artists. Despite the drought, the 2002 Festival drew in excess of 1,000 visitors to the village on the October long weekend. The most recent festival in 2008, 'A Day in the Dirt' was likewise reported to be a great success.

Building strong networks

In a study by Ken Keith, Helen Ross and Condamine Alliance towards building community capacity in the Condamine area in Queensland, key community organisations, including sports and leisure clubs, Landcare, Country Women's Association, and larger businesses were invited to attend workshops. At the workshops, each organisation was given a set of questions to fill out, about how their organisation related to other organisations. This was processed through a computer program which showed clusters of relationships. The process helped identify opportunities to connect organisations that currently had weak links to share resources and make them more effective.

Promoting community leadership

Community priorities could be developed through public forum and other community engagement mechanisms. For example, the Oregon Partnership for Disaster Resilience at the University of Oregon developed a manual outlining how to prepare and host community resilience forums. A community forum provides a platform for local governments and community organisations to share resources and information in order to better prepare their community to recover from hardship. The forum process also allows community members and technical experts to work together to integrate vulnerability data with local knowledge, values and experience.

Understanding the community

Professor Tony Vinson has worked with Mildura City Council in Victoria to develop social indicators for Mildura, to track its progress over time and allow comparison with other regions. The Mildura Social Indicators Report was first produced in 2006 and a revised and updated version report produced for 2008. It includes a range of demographic information on the community including employment statistics, education information, age demographics, participation in recreation and information on people from a non-English speaking background.

In 2008, Mildura City Council commissioned the first Community Wellbeing Survey Report to provide information on a number of indicators relating to the community's wellbeing and perception of itself. The report provides information on the integration of people, groups and organisations; decision making in the community and perceptions of Mildura as a place to live.

Measuring Social Capital - This ABS publication (cat. no. 1378.0) has been developed in consultation with a wide range of government and non-government agencies and research institutions, and contains a framework to measure social capital, with a proposed set of indicators.

Promote learning, build strong networks and support

Moorditj Coolangars ("Solid Kids") Community Hub was established in 2007 at Mt Lockyer Primary School (Albany, WA), having many students from a public housing area with related low socio-economic indicators, and a growing population of Aboriginal students. After analysing the needs of students through data and consultation, Moorditj Coolangars was developed with the overall aim to close the gap between the achievement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

The hub is managed by a coordinator and an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO) who promotes the program through strong connections into the community. Activities include information sessions for families about health and education issues, home visits to encourage attendance and discuss support options provided by the school and the Community Room, a designated drop-in space. This provides an informal setting with comfortable seating, a toy-box and library for visiting children and a non-threatening and friendly atmosphere that parents can use any time or meet informally with the AIEO.

Elders, parents and siblings are involved in Moorditj Coolangars, and the AEIO liaises with Elders in the community so that activities in the school work flexibly around events in the community. Other organisations, including health service providers, pre-schools and community groups are also linked in. Outcomes observed since the program began include parents and children feeling respected, valued and welcomed at Mount Lockyer Primary School; increased links with parents and carers; increased school enrolments; links with health professionals, education specialists and other service providers in the district; and increased cultural awareness of Wadjella (non-Indigenous) staff.

RESOURCES

Community Capacity Building – A Practical Guide
(2006) prepared by Dr Rowland Atkinson and Paul Willis
of the Housing and Community Research Unit, School
of Sociology, University of Tasmania:
http://www.utas.edu.au/sociology/HACRU/6%20
Community%20Capacity%20building.pdf

Building Resilience in Rural Communities Toolkit
(2008) - The University of Queensland and University
of Southern Queensland:
http://learningforsustainability.net/pubs/Building_
Resilience_in_Rural_Communities_Toolkit.pdf

The National Disaster Recovery Principles (2008)
are available from the South Australian Government
Website as a document, or in summary as a brochure
or poster:
http://www.dfc.sa.gov.au/pub/default.aspx?tabid=196

Community Builders NSW is an interactive electronic
clearing house for everyone involved in community
level social, economic and environmental renewal
including community leaders, community & government
workers, volunteers, program managers, academics,
policy makers, youth and seniors:
http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/

**Assessing a community's capacity to
manage change: A resilience approach
to social assessment**
Brigit Maguire and Sophie Cartwright, Bureau of Rural
Sciences, May 2008 – designed to support a resilience
approach to social assessment to support communities
adapting to changing water availability and allocation:
http://www.affashop.gov.au/PdfFiles/dewha_resilience_
sa_report_final_4.pdf

The Canadian Centre for Community Renewal has
prepared **The Community Resilience Manual: a
resource for rural recovery & renewal** along with
a publication on tools and techniques:
http://www.cedworks.com/communityresilience01.html

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