COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

VISION, ANALYSIS AND PRACTICE

JIM IFE

CAMBRIDGE

Community Development in an Uncertain World

Vision, analysis and practice

Jim Ife

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Community Development in an Uncertain World

Vision, analysis and practice

Community Development in an Uncertain World provides a comprehensive and lively introduction to modern community development. The book explores the interrelated frameworks of social justice, ecological responsibility and post-Enlightenment thinking, drawing on various sources including the wisdom of Indigenous peoples. Recognising the increasing complexity and uncertainty of the times in which we live, Jim Ife promotes a holistic approach to community development and emphasises the different dimensions of human community: social, economic, political, cultural, environmental, spiritual, personal and survival.

The first section of the book examines the major theories and concepts that underpin community development. This includes a discussion of core principles: change and wisdom 'from below', the importance of process and valuing diversity. The second section focuses on practical elements, such as community work roles and essential skills. The final chapters discuss the problematic context of much contemporary practice and offer vision and hope for the future.

Written in Jim Ife's characteristic engaging and accessible style, *Community Development in an Uncertain World* is an essential resource for students and practitioners – now more than ever.

Emeritus Professor Jim Ife holds adjunct positions at the Centre for Human Rights Education at Curtin University, Perth, at the Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights at Deakin University, and at Victoria University, Melbourne.

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Acknowledgements

The ideas represented in a book like this have many sources, and it is impossible to acknowledge – or even remember – them all. I have never been comfortable with the idea of 'intellectual property', as ideas can never be owned, but are shared, and are constantly being reconstructed in dialogue with a wide range of people. This book has been influenced by a large number of colleagues, friends, students, community workers, activists and authors at various times stretching back over more than 40 years of involvement with community work. I began working on the first edition of this book some 20 years before the publication of this fifth edition, so there have been many influences on its ongoing development. The book has been an evolving project, and many people have, knowingly or otherwise, contributed to it along the way.

There are some people who have contributed significantly to this book, and who need special acknowledgement. First, my wife, Dr Sonia Tascón, has been a continuing source of support and inspiration at both a personal and an intellectual level; I owe her a tremendous debt, and her presence in this book is strong.

It is important to acknowledge Dr Frank Tesoriero, who took over the third and fourth editions of this book while my academic and practice interests moved more into the field of human rights. I am grateful to him for undertaking this work, and also feel a sense of sadness that circumstances have dictated that he can no longer be involved with the project. It is important to point out that this edition contains only material from the first and second editions (for which I was the sole author) together with substantial additions and alterations I have made to bring it up to date. It contains none of the material that Frank added in the third and fourth editions, and hence it is published with my name as the sole author. I am also grateful to the many colleagues throughout Australia and overseas who encouraged me to take up this project again and to commit to a new edition.

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This edition is published by a different publisher, and I am grateful to Pearson Education for their generosity in releasing the copyright of the first two editions so that they could be incorporated in this new edition. I am also grateful to Isabella Mead, publisher at Cambridge University Press, for her enthusiasm for the project, and her support throughout the process. My association with Cambridge University Press goes back over 15 years now, and it has been a very professional, positive and trouble-free relationship that I have come to value highly.

Finally, this book is dedicated to my grandchildren, Ben, Emma, Joe, Hamish and Phoebe. It is, I hope, a small contribution towards creating a better future for them and for all those who will inherit the world that my generation has so comprehensively trashed and stripped of its communitarian traditions.

Jim Ife
Melbourne, 2013

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Introduction

> Despite the formidable achievements of modern, Western, industrialised society, it has become clear that the current social, economic and political order has been unable to meet two of the most basic prerequisites for human civilisation: the need for people to be able to live in harmony with their environment, and the need for them to be able to live in harmony with each other. If these two needs cannot be met, in the long term, the achievements and benefits of modern society will be transitory.
>
> The inability of the dominant order to meet these needs can be seen in the crises currently facing not only Western industrialised societies but all societies. The world is characterised by increasing instability – whether ecological, economic, political, social or cultural – and existing institutions seem only able to provide solutions which in the long term, and even in the short term, only make things worse.

Those were the words that introduced the first edition of this book, published in 1995. Eighteen years on, they are as true today as they were then, if not more so, and the justification for this book remains the same. Many things have changed in those 18 years, but the above paragraphs also remind us that many things – the most important things – have not. The world is still on a course that is headed for major crises – environmental, economic, social and political – and despite the fact that many more people are now aware of, and concerned about, the parlous state of the world and its very uncertain future, governments are still showing themselves unwilling or unable (or both) to do anything significant about it. There have been great disappointments in those 18 years: the failure of the Copenhagen summit on climate change in 2009, the inability to respond to the Global Financial Crisis in any way except by bailing out the banks and propping up global capital, the resulting austerity measures, the draconian response to the threat of terrorism since '9/11', which has served only to heighten global tensions and make a terrorist response more likely, ongoing tension and conflict in the Middle East, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as continuing conflicts in parts of Africa, the widening gap between the increasingly wealthy global elite and the rest of

the world, the inability to meet the modest Millennium Development Goals, the hardening of attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers, the emergence of right-wing and racist political groups in many countries. These suggest that the current structures of national and global government are utterly unable to meet the pressing global problems that threaten the future of human civilisation. The words that immediately followed the above 1995 passage – 'In this context, the need for alternative ways of doing things becomes critical' – now seem almost an understatement.

There are, however, signs of hope. The continuing demonstrations against globalisation, culminating in the Occupy movement of 2011, suggest that there are many people who are seeking an alternative. The widespread disillusionment with mainstream political parties, caused by the perceived irrelevance of mainstream politics and meaningless elections that fail to address many of the major issues facing the world, can also lead to people seeking a new form of politics, although it is yet unclear how this will evolve. Social media and the internet have made possible the documentation of human rights abuses and the mobilisation of opposition in the so-called Arab Spring and in other protest movements. Campaigning groups such as GetUp! and Avaaz have successfully mobilised large numbers of concerned people to oppose oppressive legislation or to struggle for environmental and social justice. Latin American social movements and progressive governments have been developing inspiring community-based alternatives: the Zapatistas in Mexico, the community response to the oil crisis in Cuba, the popular governments of Chavez in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia, the education demonstrations in Chile, the 'horizontalidad' movement in Argentina. Despite their inevitable problems, facing the hostility of global capital and conservative media interests, these represent bold initiatives towards an alternative future that are an inspiration to the world.

It is in this context, both of impending crisis and of new signs of hope, that community development can play a crucial role. There has been increasing interest in development at the community level as potentially providing a more viable and sustainable basis for the meeting of human need and for interaction with the environment, and it is not surprising that the Latin American examples above all include a strong component of alternative community development. Among activists concerned with both environmental and social justice issues, the establishment of viable community-based structures has become a key component of strategies for change. Community development represents a vision of how things might be organised differently, so that genuine ecological sustainability and social justice, which seem unachievable at global or national levels, can be realised in the experience of human community. This book represents an attempt to articulate that vision, and to provide a

theoretical framework for community development that will relate analysis, context and action.

In the years since the first edition, the organisational context of practice, dominated by managerialism, has become less conducive to good community development, as discussed in chapter 15, but nevertheless the need for, and the continuing interest in, community development remains strong. This is particularly so among those concerned for social justice and ecological sustainability, as community development is seen as a potential alternative way to organise human society; if indeed there are to be economic, political and ecological crises, as now seems inevitable, it will be our ability to work at community level that will determine the capacity of human civilisation to survive. However, the interest in community development is also driven by a belief that human community is important, and that strong communities will enrich our lives and provide a positive context for human interaction and for the meeting of human need, especially given the continuing erosion of the welfare state.

This ongoing interest in community development is shown by reaction to the earlier editions of this book, which have had a wider appeal than first imagined. This wider appeal has been evident in two directions. One is the embracing of community development by a wide range of occupational groups, not merely the human-service professionals and community activists that one might expect, and who were implicitly the readership for which the first edition was intended. I have discovered a much broader range of occupational and interest groups who feel that community development is important in their work, and this has underscored the power of the community development perspective. The other is the way the book has been found useful in different cultural contexts. Although the book is written from the perspective of a white Australian male, earlier editions have resonated with workers in different cultures, and it has been translated into several different languages. This inevitably raises questions about colonialism, a topic that is covered in chapter 9, but it also emphasises that the concerns of community development are universal, and many of the broad principles discussed in this book (such as wisdom from below, the importance of process, interdependence, participation, empowerment and so on) apply across cultural boundaries, although the way they are constructed and applied will differ significantly in different contexts.

For readers familiar with earlier editions, it is important to outline some history of this publication to avoid any confusion as to authorship. This is the fifth edition of this book, although it is the first to be published by Cambridge University Press. I was the sole author of the first two editions (1995 and 2002), but the third and fourth editions were prepared by Dr Frank Tesoriero; our names appeared as joint authors for the third edition (2006), and he was the sole named author of the fourth edition (2010), although

much of the content was continued from the earlier versions. Sadly, Frank is no longer associated with the project, and this current edition contains none of the material he added for the third and fourth editions. It does contain material written for the first two editions, together with a good deal of new material; there are 16 chapters, compared with 11 in the first edition and 12 in the second. However, the overall trajectory of the book remains the same.

The first five chapters lay the foundation for a vision of community development. Chapter 1 examines the crisis of modern Western societies and the crisis of the welfare state, and argues the need for community development. Chapter 2 explores the ecological crisis and its imperatives, in the light of Green political theory, developing an ecological perspective for community development. Chapter 3 outlines a social justice perspective, including discussion of rights, needs, equity, justice, empowerment and so on. It explores issues of class, gender and race/ethnicity from both structural and poststructural perspectives. Chapter 4 outlines elements of a post-Enlightenment position, including ideas of postmodernism and relational reality. A particularly important section of this chapter discusses Indigenous cultures, and the significant contributions they can make to community development. Chapter 5 then seeks to integrate the perspectives of the previous three chapters, in a vision for community development and for community-based human services.

The next two chapters explore two significant principles of community development. Chapter 6 is concerned with change from below, valuing the wisdom, expertise and skills of the community, and the importance of decentralisation and community control. Chapter 7 discusses the processes of community development, including the primacy of process over outcomes, and the issues of participation, democracy, consciousness-raising, peace and non-violence.

Chapters 8 and 9 outline a more global, or international, perspective. Chapter 8 is concerned with globalisation and understanding community development in a globalising world, while chapter 9 explores the important issue of colonialism, which can affect all community development practice, and considers issues around working internationally.

Chapters 10 and 11 outline eight dimensions of community development: social, economic, political, cultural, environmental, spiritual, personal and survival. Practice in each of these eight areas is discussed, with various issues identified in relation to each. The approach taken is one that emphasises the importance of all eight, in a holistic and integrated understanding of what community development means.

Chapter 12 seeks to summarise the ideas of previous chapters in a series of practice principles. There are 30 principles discussed altogether and, although there is little in this chapter that has not been covered in previous chapters, readers have found such a

summary at this point to be particularly useful as a way of encapsulating the principles of community development.

The remaining chapters are concerned with issues of practice. Chapters 13 and 14 discuss the various roles taken by community workers, and identify the skills needed to fill those roles. In doing so they discuss issues of practice/theory, the problems with prescriptive 'cookbooks', and the ways in which community workers can develop their skills. Chapter 15 is concerned with the managerial environment in which many community workers have to practice, and which is hostile to community development principles. It outlines some approaches community workers can use either to adapt to, or to directly challenge, managerialism. Chapter 16 discusses a number of other issues relating to practice, such as professionalism, value conflicts, ethics, support for workers and so on.

The book moves, in a general way, from more theoretical to more practical considerations, but it is far from a simple linear development. Indeed, part of the discussion in the earlier chapters emphasises the need to reject linear thinking, so the reader is encouraged to 'jump around' and not necessarily read the book in the order in which it is written. The book does attempt to follow a logical sequence, but there are other equally valid logical sequences that could have resulted in a very different order of the material.

Although I have attempted to make the ideas accessible to a wide readership, it has been necessary to make some assumptions about the background of those for whom the book is written. I have assumed that the reader has some familiarity with basic social and political ideas, such as social class, power, the division of labour, Marxism, feminism, socialism and so on. This is not to say that detailed or expert knowledge of such topics is necessary; completion of first-year university study in sociology, anthropology, politics or some other social science discipline, or alternatively a comparable understanding gained from general reading, should provide the reader with a more than adequate background.

I have updated the references to incorporate contemporary sources; a lot has been written since 1995. However, I have also included a number of older sources for the earlier editions where I believe they have something important to say. In this age when the 'here and now' is so valued, and where history is often marginalised, it is important that we challenge this by listening to the voices of the past as well as the present, and there is much of value to community development in earlier literature.

This book makes frequent use of a number of terms that have been grossly overused and misused in recent years, such as *community, empowerment, development, sustainable, ecological, Green, social justice, community-based, holistic, participation, consciousness-raising, non-violence, and participatory democracy*. Although these terms have been overused, they

still represent powerful ideas; indeed, their very popularity is a testament to their power and their perceived relevance. They have an important contribution to make to the vision and the practice principles of this book: the aim of the book is to clarify rather than obscure these ideas, and to reinvest them with some substantive meaning for community workers.

Throughout the book, the terms *community development* and *community work* have slightly different meanings. I have used the former to refer to the processes of developing community structures, while the latter refers to the actual practice of a person (whether paid or unpaid) who is consciously working to facilitate or achieve such development.

I have opted for the most part to use the terms *the South* and *the North* rather than *developing nations*, *Third World* or other similar terms and their opposites. None is wholly satisfactory, and living in Australia *the South* offends one's geographical consciousness but, as in other ways it is the least offensive term, it is the one I have chosen. The term *Western* (or *the West*) similarly takes liberties with geographical principles, particularly for an Australian. The term is nonetheless a useful one, and in the context of this book it refers primarily to Western culture, whereas the terms *North* and *South* are used more in an economic context; of course the distinction is not always clear-cut, as economics and culture are themselves inextricably entwined. It should, however, be noted that there is no necessary single antithesis of *Western* in cultural terms, whereas the economic constructs of *the North* and *the South* are not only opposites but also in such a structural relationship that neither could exist without the other, and each serves to define the other. I have used the term *Aotearoa* rather than *New Zealand*, as a deliberate political and cultural statement; I only wish that Australia had a similarly accepted Indigenous name.

Throughout the book there are a number of tables and diagrams that illustrate in summary form the ideas discussed in the text, culminating in figure 16.1 (see page 366), which ambitiously attempts to summarise the entire framework. They are included with mixed feelings: several readers have commented that such tables and diagrams are helpful in obtaining an overview and in seeing how the material fits together, but this needs to be balanced against the dangers of categorisation and oversimplification. Tables and diagrams can have the effect of imposing a false sense of order on a complex and chaotic reality and, hence, of inviting simplistic solutions to complex problems. To represent complex concepts by a few words in a cell of a table is to change the very nature of the content itself, and invites a dangerous reductionism. A too-rigid interpretation of such tables is antithetical to the holistic approach advocated in the early chapters, and the reader is cautioned to remember that the boundaries of the tables do not represent rigid distinctions or impermeable barriers. If the tables and

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