

The Grameen Bank Approach to Community Engagement

Paton S*

Institute for Sustainable Development, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton,
Queensland, Australia

Abstract

Muhammad Yunus, founder of the micro-credit Grameen Bank made two observations fundamental to the mindset required for non-tokenistic approaches to community development and community engagement. He noted (1997, p. 3):

“First, our knowledge base about people and their interactions is still very inadequate; second, each individual person is very important. Each person has tremendous potential. S/he alone can influence the lives of others within communities, nations, within and beyond his/her own time.”

The capacity for micro-interventions, focussed on supporting community aspirations and community identified training needs, to be effective in generating “the essential worth of individuals, fundamental to any sustainable change process” (Paton 2003, p. 5) is examined.

This paper explores the perspective that, contrary to popular rhetoric, the much misunderstood process of capacity building is only one of the elements required to generate effective community engagement. In fact creating an enabling environment is an equally vital element necessary to allow individuals and communities to reach their potential. It further argues that community engagement can only occur when people not only possess the skills essential to adequately address their own issues but also feel confident enough of their own ability and worth to participate. They must also be treated as respected equals by all others involved in the process. To what degree socially focused micro-interventions can contribute to pro-active community engagement is discussed in the practice context of the delivery of short flexible training programs designed to meet the specific needs of rural and regional areas of Queensland.

Keywords

Grameen, training, community, individual, worth

Introduction

The importance of effective community engagement is clearly indicated by the initiative of the United Nations and the Queensland Government in calling a special conference to scope and

debate the issue. In his invitation to attend this inaugural *International Conference on Engaging Communities*, Queensland's Premier Peter Beattie (2004, p. 2) noted that governments universally are being confronted with demands for more effectual engagement in all phases of their interface with community, including "planning, decision making and service delivery". He further notes that educational institutions, community organisations and the private sector are being beleaguered by stakeholders who demand, and want to participate in, genuine processes of community engagement.

The author argues that we must move away from an over-arching paternalistic notion of capacity building and focus on the actual elements of community engagement. Cavaye (2004) suggests that the notion of building community capacity devalues the informal capacity that already exists within communities. He further notes that our thinking should be re-oriented to support local people construct their own community capacity — the base line of social capital and effective community engagement.

The paper further examines the values and thinking underpinning the successful Grameen Bank which has instigated major community change through micro-credit interventions in many developing countries. It puts forward the view that values-based micro-interventions focussed on supporting community aspirations and community identified training needs have a major role in creating an environment essential for effective community engagement. If individuals and communities are to reach their full potential they require not only the competency to address their own needs but must also have the sense of self assurance and personal worth that enables them to participate. It further describes that other essential elements of effective community engagement are a creative learning environment and respectful relationships that recognise all people as equal. The scope of this type of micro-intervention to support effective community engagement is discussed in the practice context of the delivery of concise and adaptable training courses designed to meet the particular needs of rural and regional areas of Queensland.

The author draws on her experience as a Community Developer, examines the literature and utilises training evaluations to develop a qualitative perspective on the value of community driven training as an incentive to community engagement. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for the study as it could not be limited to only what was able to be measured. Qualitative research allows the researchers to familiarise themselves with the topic, and the issues and terms involved in the discussion of the topic. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992) qualitative research provides contextualisation, interpretation and an understanding of the actors' perspectives.

The Grameen Bank approach

The Grameen Bank is a concept that has readily engaged many communities in the developing world for almost thirty years. The Grameen Bank website (2005) notes that the origin of the idea can be traced back to 1976 when Professor Muhammad Yunus, Head of the Rural Economics Program at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh decided to help a woman so poor she was forced to borrow US\$0.25. He was shocked to discover that the lender then had the exclusive right to buy all she produced at the price the lender decided. Considering this no better than slave labour he compiled a list of other victims of this village money-lender. When the list was completed it contained 42 names and recorded the total amount borrowed as US\$27. He then repaid the outstanding debts with his own money. This acted as a catalyst generating an action research project which explored the practicality of a credit delivery system focussed on providing banking services for the rural poor. In October 1983 enabling legislation transformed the Grameen Bank Project into an independent bank. Although the government holds 10 per cent of the shares, the remaining 90 per cent are held by its borrowers — those normally considered underprivileged and removed from social power and influence.

In a reversal of standard banking practices the Grameen Bank operates on a system of trust, responsibility, involvement and resourcefulness and does not demand collateral from its clients. Even the very poorest people in rural Bangladesh are provided credit without collateral. Credit is used as a catalyst to improve the socio-economic conditions of those previously without access to standard banking actions and as a cost effective way to address poverty. Professor Yunus, now Managing Director, believes that if credit can be accessed by the poor on reasonable terms and conditions, millions of small people following their millions of small quests can generate the “biggest development wonder” (Grameen Bank Website 2005).

As of July 2004 the Grameen Bank had 126 branches and 3.7 million borrowers (96 per cent women). Its services cover more than 68 per cent of the total villages in Bangladesh.

Yunis (2003, p. 1) espouses a philosophy that all men and women are born equal, with each individual capable of unbounded creativity and entrepreneurship. He also believes that what separates humans from other life forms, is not their ability to care for themselves but their ability and desire to extend this care to holistically encompass the wellbeing of the world. He identifies this as the unique role of humans.

A prime transferable value of the Yunis attitude to the broader field of general community engagement lies in the recognition that by and large, we completely disregard the number and influence of people more concerned with social improvement than personal financial gains. There

are people ardently involved in trying to create a better world rather than focussing solely on personal benefits. Yunis believes that if we can accept that there are two types of people, those driven by personal benefit and those with social objectives, it would not only be more sensible, but it would provide a pathway to solving many of the issues that the personal profit approach has failed to resolve (Yunis 2003).

The need for effective community engagement within Australia

Every day life in an Australian regional town or on a farm, is subject to, and part of, fundamental community pressures which challenge values and behaviours and as Paton (2003, p. 5) indicates, can generate “a feeling of being devalued or disregarded, by the broader urban community”, a similar situation to Yunis’ rural poor who feel removed from power and social influence. What has particularly defined Australian rural communities in recent times, according to many observers, is a decline of confidence in the future (Alston 2002; Cavaye 2000). Some communities continue to struggle to create a future which will offer business and lifestyle options for the local population, others however do adjust and successfully re-invent their social and economic profile.

In part answer to this paradox Cavaye (2000) notes that the survival and revival of communities depends in some measure on the ability of community members to participate, cooperate, organise and interact, in other words, effective community engagement. It is this engagement that provides the social networks, norms and trust — the social capital — that is pivotal to community driven responses to pressure and change. Cavaye and Lawrence (2000) define ‘engagement’ as processes that support people to act upon already present passion, identify informal community leaders, re-think their needs, re-define community assets and access information. The International Institute for Sustainable Development (Hardi and Zdan 1997 cited in Cavaye et al. 2002, p. 7) proposes that any lasting progress of societies is dependant on a strategic and holistic approach to community involvement. They suggest this process must encompass an inclusive range of stakeholders, value diversity and deliver policies that recognise and act upon decisions of the community.

Additionally it appears that communities themselves recognise the fundamental necessity of citizen input to long-term change processes. As Premier Beattie (2004) has already identified, universally there is growing community pressure on all tiers of government for real citizen involvement and the development of consultation processes that are respectful of all perspectives — not tokenistic requests for community ‘sign off’ on already decided agendas. People everywhere are demanding that they be empowered to help fashion the world in which we live.

Creating a better world

Yunis (1997) suggests that our existing world is shaped by our mindsets. The world is the way it is because we have made it that way! Fortunately the contrary perspective is also valid. If we think differently we can generate another reality. Policies and institutions are built on basic assumptions we make about ourselves and about others. However, as Yunis (1997, p. 3) explains "... our knowledge base about people and their interactions is still very inadequate".

Furthermore while community engagement may be seen as problematic (Paton 2004; Cavaye 2002) if we are not achieving what we say we want, then perhaps we should check the reality of our desire to achieve it. Recently there has been a great deal of attention paid to the techniques of community engagement, but now we should direct our attention to the actuality of our willingness to give initiative and ownership to those we profess we wish to engage. Once more Yunis (1997, p. 3) reminds us of a factor fundamental to effective community engagement. "Each person has tremendous potential. S/he alone can influence the lives of others within communities, nations, within and beyond his/her own time". For community engagement to have any real meaning we must be willing to listen to the community and accept its willingness and ability to work for society's wellbeing.

Micro-interventions and empowerment

Reviewing the history of the Grameen Bank it is evident that Yunis has successfully applied his philosophy in a very practical and consistent way. Very small interventions at the local level have empowered people to take charge of their own situation. If this is true for the economic situation, does it naturally flow on to the social situation? The literature indicates that a key factor in community engagement is connected to empowerment: the willingness, ability and success of local people and community organisations to influence or make decisions and to act (CDC/ATSDR 1997).

Those seeking to engage a community can certainly provide the tools and resources that allow communities to gain mastery of their own lives. However as previously noted it is presumptuous and paternalistic for outside bodies or observers to assume they can confer on a community the power to take action on its own behalf.

In developing nations access to low interest money, backed by a philosophy of respect, trust, self help and local ownership, has been a tool that empowers people to make changes in their lives and in their communities. In developed countries where communities struggle to cope with the impacts of economic, social and technological change, it is access to training which has been identified as a key tool for those who wish to thrive rather than just survive. At a micro-level

community desired, locally appropriate training may prove to be one of most efficient tools we can utilise to encourage communities to initially engage and to maximise the effectiveness of their engagement. In the context of this discussion 'training' refers to the action of working with communities to support their aims of enhanced capability by providing both 'instruction and practice' — in line with the Concise Oxford Dictionary definition (1976, p. 1230).

Training as a catalyst to community engagement

Within this paper the evaluations from two projects established with the aims of building skills and relationships in rural communities are used to support the perspective that a small investment in effectively conducted training can pay a major dividend in community engagement.

Centre for Rural and Regional Innovation

The first program to be considered is the Centre for Rural and Regional Innovation (CRRRI) (2000–2001), a federally funded amalgamation of formal training bodies whose overarching aim was to build capacity in rural Australia from the starting point that 'education standards do matter'. Chudleigh (2001, p. 5) notes that the challenge for CRRRI was "enhancing the networks and skills of rural people to solve the problems that beset them." The emphasis of the programs was "human systems not institutional systems in education" enabling it to be "culturally driven rather than curriculum directed": (Chudleigh 2001, p. 6). The building of relationships and networks was as valued as the transference of skills.

The CRRRI program was focussed on providing rural communities with learning models and developing networks. It utilised both accredited and non-accredited training and was subject to a variety of appraisals: anonymous participant satisfaction forms; project reporting sheets for those provided with scholarships for training and a rigorous independent evaluation undertaken by Professor John Chudleigh in 2001. The three-month assessment of 13 courses delivered for CRRRI comprised of 165 surveys sent by email and 56 by post (for participants without email) with a response rate of 36.2 per cent, 57 telephone discussions and email exchanges with participants and was conducted between six and eighteen months after the completion of the training. This assessment was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the training methodology, the longer-term effect on individual participants' attitudes and activities, any subsequent flow on effect within their communities and to provide a framework for future evaluations for courses in this field (Chudleigh 2001a, p. 9). Surveys were sent to all participants of the programs evaluated however there was no breakdown given in the reporting, on the numbers of participants who responded for each individual course.

The Chudleigh study (2001a) evaluated three components of the CRRP Program and provided an assessment of the project as a whole, supported by individual assessments of each of these elements: Women in Business Leadership (WBL) Victoria; Rural Community Development Courses (RCD) Queensland and Designing a Prosperous Future (DPF) Ayr, Queensland.

The objective of all three programs was to enhance skills within rural communities, WBL through personal development and leadership training, RCD and DPF through skill and confidence building, generating opportunities for networking and peer group learning. Only the latter two provided a specific emphasis on a flow on effect of improved community engagement. It is the findings on these two programs that will be considered within this paper, when reference is made to CRRP evaluations.

The RCD courses targeted people already employed to work with community, who wished to improve their own engagement skills. The DPF program was designed to attract volunteers who wished to make a contribution to changing their community for the better, outside the role of their paid employment. As an accredited course RCD followed a proscribe outline, DPF as a non-accredited program was more flexible and whilst maintaining core topics on change and strategic planning was able to incorporate modules on communication, negotiation and interpersonal skills, requested to meet the specific needs of its participants in the Ayr community, where it was delivered. Both courses utilised experiential and reflective learning, supported participants to improve their skills and understanding and encouraged people to continue to learn and to apply their learnings within their communities.

RCD course participants believe that the program helped them in their work, improved understanding and skill levels and enhanced their confidence in tackling issues in their own communities. A significant number of evaluation respondents also noted that they had been able to use their new skills to advantage in their community, with several highlighting specific activities that had benefited from their contribution. These included: "saving school buildings, coordinating fire brigades, health services, ecologically sustainable development, aged people, young girls groups, community response groups, rural women's group, volunteer's event, meetings of leaders of local services, local aboriginal landholding group project and community builders" (Chudleigh 2002a, pp. 17-23).

DPF participants also believed that they benefited by gaining increased confidence and skills to work in the community. Networking with other participants was seen as an essential part of developing this confidence and sharing of experiences was valued. Many evaluation respondents

gave examples of their activities in community organisations. Chudleigh (2002a, p. 42) notes; “The course seems to have succeeded in changing participant’s activities in their communities.”

Some respondent statements that supported this contention were: “at 61 have entered into community organisations”, “increased confidence and involvement in community organisations”, “have used techniques in my Rotary Club”, “our organisation has completed 4 steps in our Action Plan” and “I have become involved with the Burdekin Community Association” and again “increased involvement in community organisations.” Participants also generally expressed confidence in being able to go out into their communities and “assist in the handling of a range of change management issues”. Again Chudleigh (2002a, p. 42) comments: “It is apparent that the courses have had a positive impact on the participants and on their roles and activities within their communities” and further notes that the effect is “probably enduring.”

Separate feedback to the training facilitator (Ayr reports 2000–01) indicates that course participants not previously active in groups became involved in activities including: the establishment of the Rita Island Progress Association (2), Work North Taskforce (7), Waterwatch (3), Burdekin Bowen Irrigated Floodplain Management Advisory Committee (3), Youth Action Council (1), organising and promoting Home Hill Races (1), an adopt-a-granny scheme (1), conducting community surveys (2) organising focus group interviews (1) and joining the Development Bureau of Hinchinbrook and Cardwell Shires as a volunteer worker (1). Those already involved in community organisations also expressed the belief that they were more effective in their role. Three participants noted that they had enrolled for more formal training, one through TAFE and two through University. Additionally one participant went on to employ two other course participants and to send some already employed staff to subsequent training in the belief that the training enhanced the ability of his organisation to effectively engage the community.

The Natural Heritage Trust 1 — Communication and Marketing Project 2001–03

The Natural Heritage Trust 1 (NHT1) Communication and Marketing Project 2001–03, the second program evaluated, was a practical approach by the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines (NR&M) to enhance effective community engagement and examine the effectiveness of practices including communication training, in achieving this outcome. This project was believed necessary because despite strong rhetoric on locally-driven solutions to large-scale landscape challenges via Landcare, and the resultant devolution to regions, there has been a persistent difficulty in effectively engaging the community as a whole in planning for a sustainable natural resource management (NRM) future.

Contributing to this limited engagement is the perception by many volunteer NRM groups that they lack the capacity to effectively present their own issues. Market research undertaken in 1999 by Deborah Wilson Consultants identified training as a priority for NRM volunteer groups. Critical needs identified included improved communication skills, increased capacity to achieve regional partnerships and the ability to work with the corporate sector and capitalise on networks.

To validate the effectiveness of training enhancing community engagement a state-wide capacity building training project, funded by the Federal and Queensland governments and community, was conducted across Queensland during 2001–03. The process was aimed at rural groups working in NRM. DNRM identified strong community ownership as essential for meaningful outcomes and a primarily community based steering committee was established to provide project oversight. Community members represented Landcare groups from across the state. Implementation was undertaken through a devolved grants process that involved 700 participants from 19 different groups and was delivered in 29 locations by 15 different training providers. This approach enabled the groups themselves to decide on the type of training they required, within the criteria of the project, and to choose their preferred provider. Both accredited and non-accredited training was used. Additionally, a commitment to complete a structured evaluation process was a requirement for receiving funding through this project and this was undertaken from September 2002 to June 2003. The findings were incorporated in the final project report (Moore 2003). This evaluation was less comprehensive than the process used for CRR1 and was based on a pre-prepared structured questionnaire focussed on the community engagement outcomes achieved for each group. Seventeen assessment forms completed by group coordinators were received within the year following training completion.

A number of groups in the NHT project indicated at the beginning of the program that their motivation in undertaking training was more effective community engagement. The evaluation process reflected that these groups believed their objectives were met. Respondents indicated they felt confident with communication, interpersonal and negotiation skills and were now more willing to take the initiative in engaging others in Landcare and catchment management issues. Outcomes resulting from this included the establishment of a new steering committee, greater interaction and stronger representation on Regional Boards, more effective partnerships and groups becoming self directed, independent and more effective in addressing their own issues (Moore 2003, p. 14, Appendix 7, pp. 3-20). Respondents also believed that they had become proactive, were better able to instigate action and operate more strategically, compared to pre-training days. Additionally they indicated that networks and alliances with local government and industry emerged as a positive consequence of the training. In this project many participants traveled hundreds of kilometres for training, (some by light aircraft) and commitment to take

information back to their local area and other organisations was common to all responding groups. This information sharing also extended beyond the NRM networks though talks presented to local service clubs such as Rotary, Probus, etc., community newsletters and dissemination directly into non-NRM groups, by participants (Moore 2003, Appendix 7, pp. 6-23).

The transformation of individual interest into community engagement

Chudleigh (2001a, p. 47) comments “One of the keys to achieving change through education is to achieve a change in the attitudes of participants.” The DPF course and the NHT 1 course both targeted community volunteers. The first focussed on the goals of the individual, the second on group goals, yet feedback indicates both succeeded in not only enhancing skills but in generating the confidence and can-do attitude that underpinned greater community engagement for both sets of participants. This change in attitude was also a product of the RCD course, despite the fact that it was working with professionals who already possessed some community engagement skills.

The evaluation of the two programs offering differing skill sets through a variety of training providers and yet overall delivering effective community engagement outcomes indicates that the process of the training delivery is a key factor in encouraging participants to extend their learnings to areas beyond financial gain and personal interest. Feedback from the CRRI evaluation suggests that its courses were highly successful in achieving positive change in attendees’ attitudes, their competence in their work and their activities within their communities. (Chudleigh 2001a, p. 10). This perspective was also supported in the NHT 1 project where as noted the evaluation results reflected that the micro-intervention of relevant training provision did generate social capital for its participants and their communities.

Both evaluation processes indicate that the opportunity to undertake training is a prime incentive in bringing people together (certainly this appears to be extremely important in rural areas). The ability to interact with others in group discussions and so build networks was highlighted in the Chudleigh report (200a, p. 10) and supported by the NHT 1 feedback (Moore 2003, Appendix 7, pp. 2-22) which constantly reiterated the “opportunities to develop networking” and the importance of “ new relationships” as key factors in precipitating more effective community engagement for respondents. Interactive processes — group discussions, case studies, practical exercises and the opportunity to exchange ideas were recognised as a pivotal part of the learning process and Chudleigh (2001a, p. 48) noted that CRRI feedback supported the use of a variety of interactive processes.

The relationship of the trainer with the group, the trainer's ability, facilitation and teaching techniques, group size, the range of the material and the capacity of participants to utilise what was learnt in an ongoing way within their community were identified by both evaluations as keys to generating lasting outcomes from the training, regardless of the skill sets delivered. The feeling of confidence generated by effective training was also identified by respondents of both programs as pivotal to becoming more effectual within their communities. The literature (Herbert-Cheshire and Lawrence 2002; Flora and Flora 1993) notes that training for individuals does not address the wider issue of community incapacity and suggest that what is needed is 'community building', which enhances skills and confidence so that a community can identify and act upon its own needs. The results from the project evaluations indicate that this is exactly what happened. The term 'capacity building' saw a new focus, shifting from an external catalyst to an internal, locally-determined activity.

For this 'community building' to occur the transference of skills, that is, education, must be recognised as only one element in a process that must also transfer the well founded self-assurance and sense of worth that upholds the development of respectful relationships and enables people to effectively interact and utilise their acquired skills. Chudleigh (2001, p. 42) comments that respondents linked their increased confidence and willingness to work with community, to the opportunity to network and share experiences with others. As noted before, the up-skilling of individuals, in itself is not enough to transfer benefit to the broader community. Cavaye (2000, p. 22) suggests "Human capital is always vested in the individual" yet social capital is an essential element of effective engagement and this is only created when there is 'social organisation' within a community. He (2002, p. 17) also notes that it is:

"When people feel empowered to address their own issues effectively and on an equal footing they are most likely to operate in a cooperative and collaborative manner."

He further explains that it is only when people feel they are operating from a 'position of efficacy' that they can set aside defensive and reactive operating styles that impede community engagement.

Empowering communities through training

For training to be seen as a micro-intervention that supports community engagement it must be recognised not as purely education or the dissemination of knowledge but as a total package enabling participants to effectively utilise their skills to work with and for others. The evaluations studied indicate that it is the confidence and interpersonal skills acquired through training, and the sound facilitation of the training process that generates social capital from human capital. In the CRRl evaluation the role of the facilitator was seen as fundamental to the courses achieving their

objectives (RCD 88.3 per cent: DPF 93.3 per cent) (Chudleigh 2001a, p. 5). The recognition of the importance of the role of the facilitator and the training process in generating community interaction was reflected but not quantified in the NHT evaluation (Moore 2003, Appendix 7). In rural Australia, the investment in supporting the development of confidence and the capacity to build sound relationships, acquired through training and practice is the equivalent of Yunis' investment in cottage industry. It is money in the bank — providing the capital — in this instance the social capital — on which communities can grow.

Communities themselves appear to understand the importance of, and the need for not only acquiring skills, but also disseminating them and utilising them for public benefit. Yet again we come back to Muhamad Yunis' point that many people are motivated by social objectives. As part of the original CRRRI program of 2000/2001 some people were offered training scholarships in return for making a commitment to use the training for community benefit. The majority of those who accepted this proposal honoured their commitment, successfully completed their project and provided three monthly progress and learning reports for a period of one year. Additionally since the end of the CRRRI program, in the Ayr community where the original DPF courses were conducted by community request, an additional six courses utilising similar modules on coping with change, strategic planning and interpersonal skills have been delivered in the surrounding small settlements by the same facilitator. Ayr locals and an original course participant, organised the funding and co-ordination of these courses motivated by recognition of the beneficial flow on effects in community engagement from the original training, for their whole community. .

As previously noted the evaluation from the NHT 1 Communications and Marketing project (2003) also showed participants were keen to engage others and spread their learning within the broader community and disseminated information and learning by a variety of means. After attending a communication and interpersonal skills workshop conducted through this program, a participant also initiated Winton Shire inviting that course facilitator to travel their area to run two workshops for council staff, councilors and for members of volunteer organisations to address an identified community need and enhance community engagement in that area.

Training as an effective micro-intervention that supports community engagement

Community feedback and evaluations from two programs have been used to support the view that training can act as a catalyst for community engagement. It is however far simpler to audit a set of banking accounts, than to effectively evaluate the community engagement influence of a training program. Accounts are quantitative and easily measurable, assessment of community engagement takes a qualitative approach at looking at abstracts: capacity, willingness to engage, motivation and actions taken. To gauge long-term impact, commitment from participants is

required after the completion of the training. Even in instances where a prior pledge to be involved has been obtained, there is no certainty that this will be honoured. In the studies used for this paper there was a higher degree of response from the organisations involved in the NHT1 project than from individuals participating in CRR1 courses. Another variable involved was the time span from the end of training until the evaluation, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness and the enduring nature of attitude change and engagement, although with CRR1, in some instances 18 months had lapsed and people were still involved and had had the time to achieve considerable outcomes on-ground. Face to face interviews (that also scoped capacity, process and activity) with participants and community members, 18 months after training may have given a broader and more accurate picture of the impact of the training.

A meaningful evaluation should assess changes in capacity of those involved, the effectiveness of the training process and the benefit to the community flowing from the training. The two evaluations used attempted to do this. The CRR1 assessment examined the change in the capacity of individuals through knowledge sharing, a shift in attitude and awareness, the development of individual skills, a change in practice and contribution to community. The NHT1 evaluation looked at the change in capacity of groups by exploring the development of partnerships, knowledge sharing, change in attitude and awareness and on going community engagement. Both evaluations also looked at: the effectiveness of the facilitation, which was quantified in the CRR1 study; the success of the process in supporting learning and improved community engagement; the change in attitudes of participants and the extent to which the training meets the aspirations of the community or organisation involved.

Despite the differences in the programs and the limited scope of evaluation methods, common themes have emerged from the data. Communities and organisations seeking to improve their community engagement indicate a strong preference for training that incorporates several fundamental elements. These are:

1. The training is seen as important by that community, they have input to its content and it is delivered locally.
2. The training is affordable for all members of that community. Within the CRR1 scholarship program people demonstrated that they were more than willing to undertake social obligations in return for otherwise unaffordable training.
3. The benefits of the training must outweigh the cost, and have an application that is broader than personal gain. Possible costs other than financial, include loss of time from other activities and the recognition of new responsibilities.
4. The training is interactive. Respondents favour training methods that involve everyone in the group, allowing all participants to contribute and share ownership of the success of the

workshop. The literature also recognises the value of peer group learning, noting that people learn best from people like themselves (Flora and Flora 1993; Paton 2004). The value of empirical knowledge already held within the community should not be underestimated. Respondents also reflected that communities value their own empirical knowledge.

5. The training process creates an enabling environment that promotes learning, trust, responsibility and involvement. These are the elements that also underpin the philosophy behind the Grameen Bank.

Assisting communities to enhance their skills must be acknowledged as a two way street with training providers and bureaucrats involved in the community engagement process willing to learn from the communities with which they are involved. This requires the training to be provided without rigid commitment to a fixed agenda, allowing it to address community aspirations and community identified training needs. Communities in many areas are in flux, not transition. There is no formal conduit from the traditional to the new. Currently many communities are suffering from the impact of externalities outside their control. The forces of the global economy, changing legislation and technological advances ensure they are no longer the stable environments they once were. In flux there are issues without answers and the vision of the future is not set (Wilkinson 1991). Fortunately flux provides occasions for intervention that might not occur during a period of transition.

An impediment

Whilst 'training' has been described as a word that doesn't fully encompass the transference of intangibles necessary for sustained community engagement, it is a word well accepted within the broader community. On the other hand, the term 'capacity building' because of its perceived paternalistic connotations has become an impediment to community engagement. Additionally the terminology appears to be frequently used to describe the teaching of particular technical skill sets that an agency or institution feels the community requires, to deliver a proscribed agenda, such as a safer families program, or the implementation of sustainable farming systems. Our respect for the people we wish to engage must be reflected by the language we use when we discuss the process. The words 'capacity building' must see a new focus, shifting from an external catalyst to an internal, locally-determined activity.

Real capacity arises not from an individual or a community possessing a skill but their willingness to use this skill to enhance their own situation or that of their community. Skills training, as with leadership training, in itself may not engender an attitude change or the desire for people to pro-actively practice their skills for community good.

Is training a sound investment in community engagement?

Evaluation of the nominated community training programs (Chudleigh 2001a; Moore 2003) reflects that the micro-intervention of relevant training provision can enhance community engagement and precipitate social capital. Feedback indicates that respondents not only increased their own confidence and skill levels but also built networks and extended the acquired knowledge and skills outside their own immediate groups; social capital as it is commonly understood was enhanced.

In the NHT project relationships emerged between groups with no previous history of collaboration. Plans to actively foster these new interactions were a common thread in the project evaluation and if implemented may increase social inclusion and involve those in communities who have been previously marginalised from community participation. As mentioned, following the RCD courses participants became involved in supporting a variety of activities within their communities and respondents from DPF initiated new community activities, became very proactive within existing groups and enrolled in further training.

Evaluations from all programs reflect that participants place a high value on people skills gained through both instruction and practice, with participant responses noting that interpersonal skills once acquired were appreciated by recipients. In an environment where community engagement has become a government priority tools that enable the development of positive relationships within diverse communities, and with bureaucracies and industries are accepted as vital. New relationships formed, locally-driven skill building and the confidence created, contribute to the social infrastructure required for strong and healthy local communities. Chudleigh (2001a, p. 55) comments that one of the most encouraging findings of his evaluation was the demonstrated activity of many of the respondents in now using their learning in their community.

The paradox of community engagement is that social capital and sound social infrastructure are essential for effective community engagement. Nonetheless it is in the communities where this is lacking that the need to engage is most urgent. We must rethink our paradigms and be prepared to learn and relearn and acknowledge that we still have a lot to understand about the motivations and interactions of people. There are socially motivated people willing to transform their individual passion and skill into community benefit. Access to appropriate training may provide the catalytic micro-intervention required.

Community engagement must be about empowerment. A simple aphorism says it all:

Tell me, and I will forget

Show me and I may remember

Involve me and I will understand

Empower me and I will act.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to acknowledge the training sponsors, CRRI, NHT 1 and the Queensland Department of State Development and Innovation, and the training participants. She would also like to acknowledge the valuable assistance of Alison Moore, Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines and John Homan.

References

- Alston M 2002, 'Social Capital in Rural Australia', *Rural Society*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 88-190.
- Ayr Reports (2000–01)*, Unpublished participant progress reports from the CRRI 'Designing a Prosperous Future' Training Program, Ayr, Queensland.
- Beattie P 2004, 'Invitation from the Premier of the State of Queensland', in *International Conference on Engaging Communities* brochure, viewed 1 October 2004, <<http://www.engagingcommunities2005.org>>.
- Cavaye J 2000, *Rural Community Development*, Rural Extension Centre, Gatton, Queensland, 24-28 July.
- Cavaye J 2001, 'Social Capital: The Concept, The Context', *Social Capital Symposium*, hosted by the Community Service and Research Centre at the University of Queensland, 11 September.
- Cavaye J & Lawrence G 2000, 'Regional and Rural Development – Fulfilling a Partial Approach,' Keynote address, *SEGRA Conference*, Ballarat, Victoria, 20-22 November.
- Cavaye J 2003, *Our Community – Our Future: A Guide to Community Development*, University of Queensland, Gatton Campus, Community Development course notes.
- Cavaye J 2004, 'Governance and Community Engagement: The Australia Experience', in eds W R Lovan, M Murray & R Shaffer, *Participatory Governance: Planning, Conflict Mediation and Public Decision-Making in Civil Society*, Ashgate Publishing, England.
- Cavaye J 2004a, *Social Capital: A Commentary on Issues, Options and Measurement*, A commissioned paper produced for the International Observatory Pascal – Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions 2004, viewed 20 November 2004, <<http://www.obs-pascal.com/reports/2004/Cavaye.html>>.

CDC/ATSDR Committee on Community Engagement 1997, *Principles of Community Engagement*, Public Health Practice, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia, viewed 1 March 2005, <<http://www.cdc.gov/phppo/pce/index.html>>, ch. 1.

Chudleigh J 2001, *Centre for Rural and Regional Innovation: Proof of Concept*, Executive Summary: Final Report to the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training from the Centre for Rural and Regional Innovation, University of Queensland, Gatton and University of Melbourne, Dookie, Victoria.

Chudleigh J 2001a, *An Assessment of Capacity Building Courses conducted by The Centre for Rural and Regional Innovation (CRRRI) during 2000 and 2001*, A course evaluation undertaken for the Centre for Rural and Regional Innovation, University of Queensland, Gatton and University of Melbourne, Dookie, Victoria.

Deborah Wilson Consultant Services 1999, *Research on the Communication Needs for Landcare and Integrated Catchment Management Communities*. Report produced for the Department of Natural Resources, Brisbane.

Flora C & Flora J 1993, 'Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure: A Necessary Ingredient', in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Rural America: A Blue Print for Tomorrow, ANNALS, AAPSS, no. 529, September, pp. 48-58.

Glesne C & Peshkin A 1992, *Becoming a Qualitative Researcher: An Introduction*, Longman, White Plains, New York.

Grameen Bank n.d., *Grameen Bank at a Glance February 2005*, viewed 18 February 2005, <<http://www.grameen-info.org/bank/>>.

Herbert-Cheshire L & Lawrence G 2002, *Structural Adjustment and Sustainability – a case study of Monto, Queensland*, Occasional Paper 1/2002, Institute of Sustainable Regional Development, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, Queensland.

Moore A 2003, *NRM Groups undertaking strategic on ground work through effective communication and marketing*, Natural Heritage Trust 1 final project report 2003, Queensland Natural Resources and Mines; unpublished report, Brisbane.

Moore A & Paton S 2004, 'Building Local Skills – a mixed bag', *Social Capital Symposium*, Charles Sturt University, Wagga, 7 December 2004, Submitted for peer review and publication.

Oxford University Press 1976, *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 6 edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford, England.

Paton S 2003, *What Comes First, the Emu or the Egg? The Essential Interconnection between Healthy Rural and Remote Communities and a Healthy Landscape*, 2003 National Landcare Conference, Darwin.

Wilkinson K 1991, 'The Future of the Community in Rural Areas', in ed K Pigg, *The Future of Rural America: Anticipating Policies for Constructive Change*, Westview Press, p. 260.

Yunis M 1997, *On the Occasion of Receiving the Planetary Consciousness Business Innovation Prize 1997 of the Club of Budapest*, Viewed 18 February 2005, <<http://www.grameen-info.org/agrameen/speech.php3?speech=5>>.

Yunis M 1998, *Commencement Address*, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 13 August, viewed 18 February 2005, <<http://www.grameen-info.org/agrameen/speech.php3?speech=1>>.

Yunis M 2003, *6th Annual Commonwealth Lecture*, 11 March 2003, viewed 18 February 2005, <<http://www.grameen-info.org/bank/Commonlth01.html>>.