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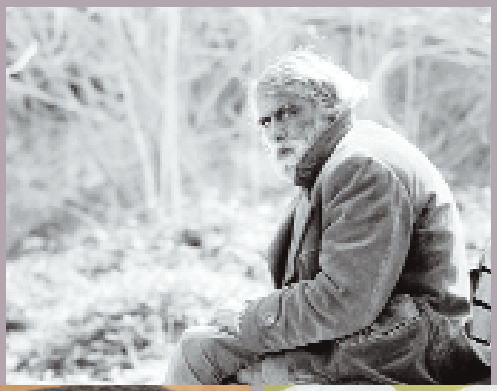
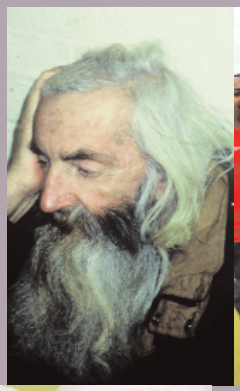
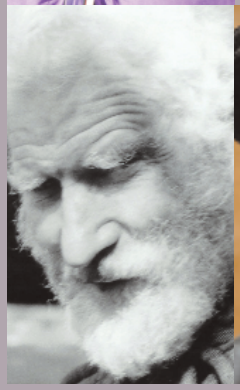
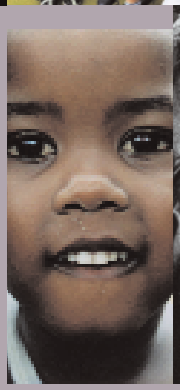
Living a Good Life

Bringing relationships, community and purpose to the lives of marginalised people




Prepared by Diane Diacon and Jim Vine

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Living a Good Life

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Contents

1. Preface

In November 2009, the Rockefeller Foundation sponsored a meeting at its Bellagio Center in Italy, bringing together 18 recognised social innovators from around the world. These innovators are all working to ensure that marginalised and vulnerable people are not only decently housed, but can also feel welcome and lead a dignified life in the communities in which they live.

Coming from ten countries in six different continents, the participants work with a range of vulnerable individuals and communities, including those whose physical and mental differences set them apart from mainstream society, as well as those excluded by generations of prejudice such as dalits in India, the Gypsy and Roma people of Europe and indigenous people in Australia, Canada and India. Other participants work with homeless persons, including older homeless individuals, refugees and migrants and those left behind after the breakdown of the communist system in Eastern Europe.

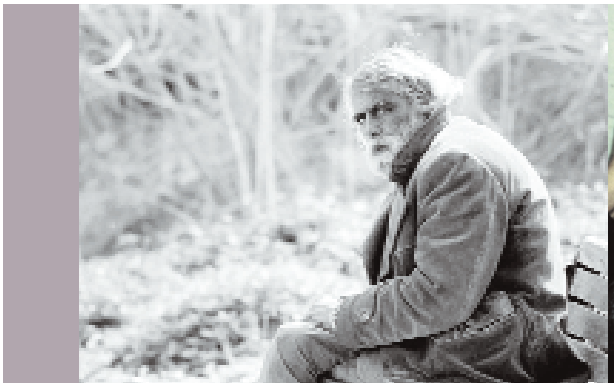
All of the participants had many years, often decades, of deep personal commitment to their work, enabling them to share lessons gained through long experience. There was a broad harmony of values, with all participants having respect for those individuals who live on the margins of society and recognising the limitations of current welfare systems in addressing their needs and rights.

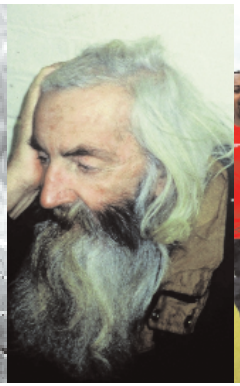
Of particular significance was the opportunity to share experiences between developing and developed countries. Despite the differences in the level of public resources available in their countries, participants shared tremendous commonality with respect to their basic philosophy and had a great deal to share with and learn from each other concerning strategies for overcoming their respective problems.

This report sets out the results of the deliberations and sharing of experience of this group of social innovators over a period of three days. One of the key purposes of the meeting was to identify innovative practices and policies and how they could be implemented to address the persistent and increasing problems faced by those who continue to be excluded and marginalised from society. Brief introductions to 14 such practices are set out in the text with references to where more detailed information can be accessed.

2. Key insights

- Resilience and belonging come from addressing the underlying issues of what constitutes a good life.
- A good life is one that includes a home that offers sanctuary, a purpose through being able to make a contribution to society and meaningful relationships that give a sense of belonging.
- Government provided welfare systems are increasingly unaffordable and often fail to meet the real needs of those they seek to assist. Bold action is needed to refocus policy to ensure that marginalised and vulnerable people can have a purpose in life and a sense of belonging, as well as a home.
- The welfare support model offers few opportunities for self-help, but social enterprise and other self-help approaches have proved highly effective in helping to build confidence and provide an opportunity for contribution to society rather than dependency on it.





3. Relationships, purpose and community - an introduction

Studies of personal happiness have regularly questioned what it is that people value and what makes them happy. Their key and consistent finding is that personal happiness derives from strong personal relationships, a feeling of belonging to a wider community, and the ability to do meaningful work. These fundamental elements of relationships, purpose and community are denied to many millions of people, especially those vulnerable and marginalised individuals and groups who are excluded from the societies in which they live.

Rather than focus immediately on how services and programmes should be delivered and resources better allocated, the fundamental question was posed, what constitutes 'living a good life' for vulnerable and marginalised people? The answer was, as indeed for most of us, a home that offers sanctuary, a purpose through being able to make a contribution to society and meaningful relationships that give a sense of belonging.
The lessons drawn from studies[1] of people with disabilities who now have social networks can be equally applied to a wide range of marginalised and vulnerable groups; namely that:

- An exclusive focus on needs and inabilities leads to isolation and loneliness;
- A focus on gifts and assets leads to inclusion and acceptance;
- Everyone wants to make their contribution to society;
- Relationships are the most effective ways to discover, appreciate and enable people to make a contribution;
- It is through their contributions that people will be accepted as full citizens;
- No disability, label or condition prevents friendships from forming;
- Welcoming marginalised people into community life serves as a catalyst for belonging, for everyone.

Provision to meet the needs of marginalised groups, where it does exist, relies heavily on government-funded programmes and services. These are delivered to those defined as entitled to them, with eligibility deriving from proven poverty, deficit or inability. Inevitably this creates a focus on what is lacking rather than what is present in an individual or community. People's deeper needs for relationship and the opportunity to contribute are harder to address, measure and define and are consequently ignored. Whilst recognising the value of professional intervention and the importance of providing support to vulnerable individuals, the focus must be to support a good life rather than supplant it. The challenge to be addressed today is how to bridge the divide between the well-

1 Al Etmanski, Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network, Canada

established formal system of care and the natural 'informal' systems, without losing the integrity of each.

In many developing countries there are not even rudimentary government safety nets and a common understanding of government attitudes is typically that poor people only need poor solutions, and absolutely poor people deserve pathetic solutions. As a result of this type of thinking, the poor, marginalised and socially excluded are relegated to a sub-human existence. Even in some wealthier countries, the level of homelessness would indicate that a similar attitude prevails. In the absence of government provision, it is non-governmental groups working alongside poor and excluded communities themselves who have together pioneered practices for improving their living conditions.

Although all those present at the meeting had a strong community focus in their work, the limitations of this were well recognised. Communities can be creative and inclusive places but can also be very exclusionary and block progressive thinking. Community solutions are often seen as highly desirable, almost magical, which they are not. A cohesive community is not necessarily welcoming of the stranger and the needs of marginalised and vulnerable people may also be neglected where they are not deemed to be a local priority. Community development can be supported by the political right as a way of avoiding government responsibility and putting large structural issues onto the backs of people with the least resources.

Enabling individuals and communities to belong is more than providing housing, access to credit or social welfare. It involves enabling people to become citizens rather than beneficiaries or clients of a welfare system. This requires a radical change in the perception and understanding of vulnerable and marginalised groups and how their needs can be met and their potential to contribute realised.

In order to bring about effective policy and practice in meeting this challenge, the four following key areas for action were identified. Each of these areas is dealt with in detail in subsequent sections of the report, and examples of proven practice are provided for each.

- The current policy focus on delivering services to marginalised groups should be **reframed** to one of facilitating a life of participation and contribution, a key element of which is being able to belong. This involves developing a new

language that helps us to imagine and express radical alternatives.

- Proven and successful demonstration projects should be **scaled up** in such a way as to ensure impact, durability and spread. This scaling up should be based on strategic involvement, an enabling policy environment and bold, innovative partnerships.

- The responsibility to ensure that people's basic needs are met and their human rights protected remains with **government**, although the private and civil society sectors have an increasing and key role to play in developing innovation and implementation.

- The **social enterprise** route has proven itself to be successful among marginalised groups, enabling them to rebuild homes, lives and have a place in their communities and should be developed further. It also enables civic society to be less dependent on government and avoids it being perceived as a begging sector.

4. Reframing

Key messages

- Bold action is needed to refocus policy on what really matters, i.e. the ability of vulnerable and marginalised individuals to lead a meaningful and dignified life.

- Entitlement-based welfare systems focus on deficit, seeing only the lack of money and physical or mental ability in a person, rather than any positive attributes or abilities.

- Government-provided welfare systems in the developed world are increasingly unaffordable and often fail to meet the real needs of those they seek to assist. In the developing world they rarely exist at all.

For many years, there has been a common perception in wealthy countries that the provision of government-funded services and programmes will solve the problems of poverty and meet the care and support needs of marginalised individuals and communities. It is increasingly recognised that, even in the wealthiest of countries, this approach does not always address needs, is increasingly unaffordable and that a different way of thinking is needed.

As Thomas Kuhn[2] noted, scientific understanding proceeds by means of periodic paradigm shifts or radical changes in current ways of thinking, which open up new approaches to understanding that have never been considered valid before. In the same way, our perceptions of the needs of marginalised and vulnerable groups and how they should be supported now need to undergo a similar radical shift in thinking.

The fundamental challenge is to enable marginalised and vulnerable individuals to have a home, meaningful employment and a sense of belonging to a community where they are welcomed and valued. Conventional thinking in countries of abundance is that a person is entitled to receive support because they are sick or poor. As a result, a whole system around entitlement,

2 Thomas Kuhn was an American intellectual who developed several important notions in the fields of sociology and the philosophy of science.

poverty and sickness has developed over time, typically initiated by governments with the best of intentions. This approach is based on the idea of deficit – seeing only the lack of money and physical or mental ability, seeing what a person cannot do rather than what they can. This way of thinking underlies the failures of the current welfare system in so many countries and needs to be reframed, so that the focus is on enabling individuals to lead meaningful, productive lives and contribute to their community, rather than simply delivering services and programmes because people are entitled to them on account of their poverty or ill health. This is a profound change, with major implications for how governments allocate resources and meet their obligations to those they are elected to serve.

Entitlement to programmes and services is closely defined in an attempt to regulate and allocate resources fairly. However, in a world where we seek to define everything, do we have the language or ability to define what really matters – people's sense of belonging and the quality of their relationships? Translating what is a well-rooted language and concept base into a different set of goals which are seen as soft, indefinable and incredibly expensive is a massive challenge. Not to address it will perpetuate welfare systems that spend large sums of money and do not necessarily address the real needs of those they set out to assist.

Examples of successful reframing of conventional thinking

In order to better understand what can be achieved by reframing, the examples below show how pioneering and successful programmes around the world have challenged the conventional way of thinking.

Case Study 1

Wintringham, Australia

No older person should ever have to live in a night shelter

Wintringham is a not-for-profit welfare organisation, working for over 20 years with elderly homeless men and women in Melbourne, Australia. It has successfully shifted government understanding, and funding, so that elderly homeless people are now seen first and foremost as being elderly, rather than homeless, and entitled, as a matter of right to access mainstream aged care funding sources.

Wintringham unashamedly builds beautiful buildings within attractive and enjoyable environments, reversing a worldwide tradition that expects homeless people to accept ugly and institutional buildings. All housing and support is based on the primary principle that residents should retain, in as many ways as possible, control over life decisions, personal health and daily routines.

Residents take a great deal of pride in their home. The sense of futility, anxiety and hopelessness that is associated with life in a night shelter has been replaced with a real sense of self worth and personal dignity. For many hundreds of people a permanent exit point to homelessness has been achieved and the latter years of life are lived out in comfort and safety and amongst friends.

More: www.wintringham.org

Case Study 2

OPZ, Geel, Belgium

Psychiatric foster care providing security and dignity

The unique programme for fostering mentally ill people has organically grown over 700 years and is firmly ingrained in the population in Geel and neighbouring towns. People here are not afraid of mental illness, they embrace it. About 350 clients live with 300 families in Geel and neighbouring towns. The families offer a comprehensive support system, ranging from food and board to a social network. A safety net of hospital care and professional support is available if needed and even those who would seem to be incurably afflicted can, potentially, live full, dignified, loved and secure lives. Notwithstanding its long tradition, psychiatric foster care in Geel is more relevant than ever. Increasingly, foster care is seen as a more humane alternative to extended or frequent hospital admission and an excellent solution for those who can no longer or do not wish to live by themselves.

In professionally managed systems, professionals set performance targets, seeking to achieve progress which in modern psychiatry is often defined as independent living. In Geel, a different pattern and philosophy prevails. Here, it is perfectly acceptable for people to live in a family situation and have the support that a family structure brings. Independent living is not necessarily the goal. Years of experience in Geel shows that psychiatric foster care for the mentally ill has value both to the people involved and the wider community.

More: www.opzgeel.be

Case Study 3

Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network, Canada

Living a good life

With the advance of medical care, families are now increasingly facing the question of what happens to a person with a disability when their parents die. The Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN) is a social enterprise based in Canada that seeks to help families find an answer to this question. PLAN recognises that the biggest handicap faced by people with a disability is not their diagnosis, but their isolation and poverty. It sees caring relationships as the key to safety, security and a good life and recognises that people with disabilities have important contributions to make to their communities.

Ensuring financial security is a key element in the lives of those with disabilities, as it is for everyone, and PLAN was responsible for pioneering the Registered Disability Savings Plan, which is a tax-deferred savings vehicle that assists families in planning for the long-term financial security of their relatives with disabilities. It is the first of its kind in the world and seeks to avoid the vested interests of the service economy and put money directly in the pockets of those with disabilities. With a commitment to match-funding, the vehicle enables government to lever in other sources of funds that would not normally be available and opens up the idea that money can be mobilised differently to meet social objectives.

More: www.plan.ca

Case Study 4

The National Alliance to End Homelessness, USA

Nationwide mobilisation

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) was established in 1983 to address the then emerging issue of homelessness in the United States. Today, homelessness is a much more common experience, with one per cent of the total US population becoming homeless every year, a pattern driven primarily by the increasing shortage of affordable housing.

After 15 years of large institutionalised programmes, NAEH recognised that the homelessness problem could not be solved by growing the US homeless system and that a new approach was needed. Working with a variety of partners, such as prison and hospital authorities, NAEH challenged communities and the nation to plan to end homelessness, not simply manage it. By looking at issues with a wider framework for example, it was observed that it cost $25,000 - $40,000 to keep people in transitional housing, whilst they saved up $3,000 to move back into mainstream housing. Congress adopted the idea of ending homelessness, allocating significant funding for supportive housing and prevention. Four hundred communities have also adopted plans to end homelessness. Efficient and rapid re-housing, advocacy, working with the media and evidence-based impact assessment have proved highly effective and between 2005 and 2007 homelessness in the United States fell by 12 per cent and chronic homelessness by 30 per cent.

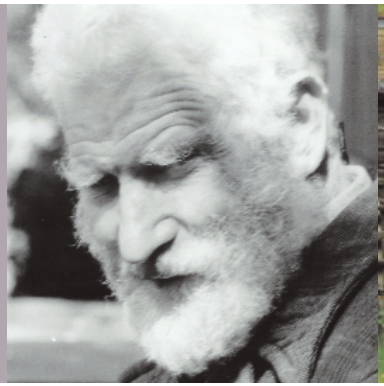
More: www.endhomelessness.org

Lessons learned for successful reframing

Reframing requires firstly a recognition that existing systems are failing and then boldness of thought and action to bring about change. Only when an individual, community or society begins to change its values, can real change begin to be brought about. The understanding of the change that is needed comes from talking to the individuals and communities affected, as well as those who have new or different perspectives. A common response when trying to understand the failure of any system is to blame the victim. For example, if indigenous people damage the houses provided for them, blame is immediately attached to their behaviour rather than asking the question whether the housing provided was appropriate for their culture and lifestyle.

For reframing to be successful it is necessary to:

- Be persuasive, by clearly believing in the value of the reframing and having a real sense of urgency about the need to make it happen.
- Run the reframed ideas by a number of critical people to find any weaknesses in the rationale before they are taken into the public domain.
- Keep the reframing as simple as possible, so it can be absorbed by decision makers. The choice of words is important, as there needs to be ongoing political acceptability of the terms used.
- Generate interest amongst both decision makers and communities by focussing on solutions and opportunities rather than the problems; for example, by talking about social entrepreneurship rather than shelter provision in relation to homelessness.
- Recognise the importance of success stories, the power of working models and the role of the arts in helping people look at things differently and have confidence that other ways of doing things can be successful.
- Build local awareness and support by enabling people to get to know marginalised individuals living in their community. For example, Common Ground in the United States asked people to assist with surveys of rough sleeping, which resulted in the community taking a collective response to try and address the problems of homelessness.
- Learn from the private sector, where corporations spend millions of dollars developing persuasive frames for their products and have skills and approaches that could be used effectively in support of marginalised communities and the way that society perceives and treats them.



- Changing how people perceive those who are homeless, as well as other marginalised groups, needs engagement with the media, as this is highly instrumental in addressing people's understanding. Although there are risks of mis-interpretation and distortion in talking to the media, it is nevertheless an important element of campaigning about homelessness and achieving social transformation and improving community acceptance for new ways of doing things.

Where it is possible to shape or nuance the reporting, working with the media can be very valuable, particularly when journalists are prepared to spend time, really understand situations and maintain contact over years. Not all experiences with the media are positive however; especially when superficial stories fail to get messages across accurately or where fear and hatred are actively promoted through selective and inaccurate reporting, as is the case for Gypsy/Roma and Traveller communities throughout Europe. Working with the media requires a sophisticated understanding and different approaches are used for running campaigns and providing information. Media campaigns however can be expensive and time consuming and sometimes it is more effective to work privately behind the scenes and not to get in a public media fight with decision makers.

5. Scaling up

Key messages

- Many effective and innovative interventions which successfully meet the housing and support needs of marginalised groups are not scaled up and remain as isolated and shining examples.
- For an intervention to be scaled successfully, a systematic approach is needed to ensure that it can achieve impact, durability and spread.
- Inspiration is crucial in convincing others, with stories of success lifting the spirit and convincing others that there is a working and successful alternative.

Although many effective and innovative interventions have been developed for addressing the housing and support needs of marginalised groups, they tend to remain isolated and shining examples. Taking a successful intervention to scale requires a clear intention to do so, a strategy and recognition that a different approach will be needed from the one that was used to get it started in the first place. A systematic approach is needed to ensure that the scaling up can achieve impact, durability and spread.

There are a variety of ways in which the term 'scaling up' can be understood. The simplest model is where an existing organisation grows larger and increases its activity (expansion). A wider impact can be achieved where new organisations are developed to carry out the same activity, possibly through franchising to retain quality control (replication) and a more systemic approach still is achieved with a change to a policy framework, either of government or large institutions, to enable the intervention to exist in the mainstream with a range of different suppliers. Influencing the availability of funding flows for a type of work for example, allows other organisations to come and fill similar niches in different places, although perhaps using different approaches that are suited to their area.

The boundaries between these are potentially quite blurred and the most appropriate route for any innovation will inevitably depend on individual circumstances.

Scaling any intervention is rarely easy. It typically requires a tremendous amount of negotiation, patience, flexibility and time to be successful. There is a greater chance of scaling up an intervention when it:

- addresses a core problem
- is not too complex to understand or implement
- is really valued by the end user
- brings widely recognised benefits to a large number of people

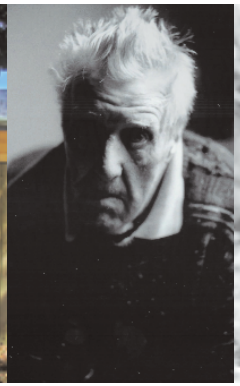
Challenges faced when scaling up an intervention

There are many different ways to scale up an intervention and it is not always clear which is the best way to do this. Only in a few instances will ideas spread virally, taking off on their own without any help. The following points should be noted:

- In many instances interventions are not scalable in their current format and need to be reformatted. What works well at a local scale for example, may not do so when amplified to a larger one, as a large institutionalised system may not be able to address the issues addressed successfully by smaller grass-roots organisations.
- There may be huge and unintended consequences of scaling up, even to the point where the fundamental nature of the intervention is lost. The process of delivering a programme at scale often means that it gets distorted or changed, with large sums of money going in fees, administration and consultancy costs. What may have originally cost a few thousand dollars to build a house in a small demonstration project ends up costing over $100,000 when it becomes part of an institutionalised process.
- People who are doing really effective work do not always have the time and capacity to spread their ideas. Advocating for, or creating, an enabling environment is often well beyond the capacity and scope of influence of many small organisations.
- It is often difficult to take a bird's eye view of an issue and understand the wider setting in which a successful intervention is working. To do so may well involve getting beyond the barriers of government departments.

- Maintaining values and staying nimble are two major challenges for all small organisations as they grow larger and begin to scale up their activities. Strategies to overcome this include effective leadership (ensuring that the CEO is a Chief Enthusiasm Officer) and continual reinvigoration with fresh ideas. The formation of staff in an organisation is crucial for this. Formation goes beyond training, it is about forming values and it is essential if real and long-lasting change is to take place.

Many of the case studies included in this report have undergone expansion and replication of their programmes. Examples of more systemic approaches are set out below. The Barka Foundation for Mutual Help (more details on page 32) has also worked in this more strategic manner in helping bring four key pieces of national legislation into being, which support the development of civil society and social enterprise in Poland, address the problems of social exclusion with the creation of eight Centres for Social Integration and providing financial support for social housing organisations.



Case Study 5

Common Ground, USA

Affordable housing, outreach and prevention

Common Ground (CG) was established in New York in 1990 to address the problems faced by homeless people in that city and is now an international leader in the development of solutions to homelessness. By focussing on why individuals became homeless in the first place and understanding patterns of homelessness it has highlighted the value of a strategic, evidence-based approach to its task. Highly successful in its work of providing housing and outreach services and working to prevent homelessness, it has sought to scale up its activities to other US cities.

CG has three key approaches to scaling up its work:

- **Working in catalytic cities, where the national pattern of homelessness can be addressed, i.e. Los Angeles, which has the highest number of homeless persons, Washington, D.C. to ensure that good models are in plain view of US legislators and New Orleans, which shows the real failure of government to prevent crisis or to repair a community but where communities are providing solutions.**
- **Focussing on those neighbourhoods where there are some of the worst poverty and social indicators, i.e. addressing the needs of the most marginalised of the marginalised.**
- **Understanding fully the concentrated distribution of homelessness, through volunteers doing accurate street counts and using this information to work with partners in the eight states and 50 large cities which account for 65per cent of homelessness in the United States.**

More: www.commonground.org

Case Study 6

Un Techo para Chile (A Roof for Chile)

International scaling through volunteers

Un Techo para Chile (UTPCH) is an NGO founded in 1997 in Chile by a group of university students and a Jesuit priest who were appalled by the country's deplorable slum conditions and felt compelled to take an active role in addressing them. It provides a non-welfare way of helping people living in slum settlements overcome poverty, giving them the opportunity of taking a leading role in improving their lives. The work of UTPCH has grown rapidly since it started 1997 and now covers eight of the 13 regions in Chile as well as having a presence in 14 other LAC countries where it is known as Un Techo para mi País (A Roof for my Country).

The initial work involved students helping slum dwellers build small wooden transitional houses to meet their immediate shelter needs. Having scaled up this activity nationally, social inclusion programmes were established as a second stage of activity, with the volunteers helping the slum dwellers improve their economic position. A third phase is currently underway with the provision of permanent accommodation. Those who have gained from its work are not only the 30,000 families who have dignified temporary homes and the 10,000 families who will obtain permanent housing, but also the thousands of young volunteers whose understanding of poverty and inequality has been increased.

More: www.untechoparachile.cl

Case Study 7

Housing Action Charitable Trust, UK

Sharing the learning

In some instances scaling up has meant that a social housing organisation's original values and purpose are put aside as they become larger, more bureaucratic or commercially oriented and remote from those they are seeking to assist. The Housing Action Charitable Trust (hact) seeks to bridge the increasing divide between large mainstream social housing providers in the UK and the small informal civil society associations which work closely with those in need.

One particular area where this work was needed was with refugees and asylum seekers, whose trust and confidence lay with small community groups, able to speak their language and aware of their cultural traditions. Hact's crucial facilitation and linking role not only identified and met the real needs of these small, hard-to-reach groups, but also helped to establish relationships with housing associations who were willing to work in partnership to address the wider issues identified.

More: www.hact.org

Case Study 8

Community Shelter Board, Columbus, USA

Rebuilding lives

The Community Shelter Board (CSB) is small, self directed non-profit organisation working to end homelessness in the city of Columbus, for which it has won national recognition. It oversees over $12 million in funding for homelessness prevention initiatives, emergency shelters, housing services, and supportive housing — showcasing an innovative, collaborative model for abolishing homelessness.

CSB works collaboratively with 12 partner agencies to unify resources and knowledge, helping over 8,000 people each year to rebuild their lives. CBD uses a systems approach, taking an integrated, directional and data driven approach to the range of issues relating to homelessness in the city and Franklin County. Its four key areas of work relate to access, crisis response, transition and advocacy and, unusually, it derives its funding primarily from non-federal sources.

More: www.csb.org

Scaling up effectively

Convincing other people of the value of an intervention is essential in any scaling up. It cannot simply be assumed that an idea will be taken up, even if it addresses a very real problem faced by local people and communities. Inspiration is crucial in convincing others, with stories of success lifting the spirit and giving a vision of an alternative future. Art in all its forms is an ageless and effective way in which values and stories can be passed on. All too often the argument for scaling up a successful intervention relies solely on its cost-effectiveness to convince others and, whilst saving money, it tends to overwhelm the greater issue of the resources being used ineffectually.

Advocacy is an important way of helping both people and institutions realise that there are effective approaches and solutions that can be successfully used. There can be many different advocates for an intervention, including those who experience the problems at first hand, those who provide services and can see the nature and extent of the problem and external advocates who can be seen as independent. Research is an important tool of advocacy, giving understanding of a programme's effectiveness and existing gaps as well as identifying and helping spread good ideas.

Assuming that careful research has shown that the intervention is capable of being scaled up within the given context, it is necessary to establish an appropriate infrastructure to enable that intervention to flourish in the mainstream. Key considerations in ensuring that the scaling up has the necessary impact, durability and spread include:

- There is sufficient political will, available resources and willing partners to deliver the scaling up. Using public pressure and co-opting possible sources of entrenched interests as partners are two possible ways in which more resistant groups can be brought on board.
- The policy, legal and regulatory frameworks enable the scaling up process to take place and there is sufficient capacity within all levels of government to support the framework.
- There is clear leadership of the scaling up process, which is not always an easy task when there are multiple stakeholders. There is no reason why leadership should automatically belong to the government, NGO or local community group that developed the intervention in the first place.

- Part of scaling up is the responsibility to create system change in sectors wider than the immediate one. For example, the solution to ex-offenders living homeless on the streets may well lie in reforming the prison system. Putting housing at the centre of thinking and providing decent accommodation on release will help to lower the rate of re-offending. A reduction in street homelessness can therefore be a side effect of prison reform.
- Interventions that are taken to scale should be careful to maintain their intrinsic and recognised value to the end users, be proven to work, and be evaluated on an on-going basis to ensure that they are needed and remain effective.

6. The role of government

Key messages

- Governments around the world have become increasingly paralysed and incapable of the implementation that is expected of them, either due to extreme pressure on resources or inefficient and/or corrupt practices.

- Civil society can provide positive assistance to government by pioneering effective practical solutions and mobilising citizens' capabilities in local communities to deliver change.

Government is the body within any community that has the authority to make and enforce rules, laws and regulations and its key role is to provide economic, social and military security for those it governs. What most people want is a home, a job and to live in a community where they feel safe and that they belong. Governments vary in their willingness and ability to ensure that those they govern have access to these basic essentials.

The term social contract[3] is used to describe the tacit relationship between people and the government and broadly states that the people give up some rights to a government in order to receive or maintain social order through the rule of law. The social contract gives people both rights and responsibilities and confers on government a duty to ensure certain minima. Protection from poverty is widely held to be included within the concept of social security, and although the goal is decidedly good, the effectiveness of the government welfare programmes and services in achieving this is much in question. There has been a marked decline in confidence and trust in governments and institutions in recent years, reflecting an increasing fragility of the social contract.

Civil governments have both elected officials and permanent civil servants whose longer and more stable tenure ensures they play an important role

3 A construct originally developed by the philosopher Plato and later expounded on by Hobbes and Rousseau

in delivering government policy. Established practices and standards tend to survive better than pet political fancies and there is inherent inertia and resistance to change within any government system. Governments have a variety of levers at their disposal which they can use to deliver their policies. These levers include taxation, regulation and standards, grants and contracts, procurement, public information/propaganda and legislation. Civil government exists at a range of levels, from very local communities up to the international organisations such as the United Nations, each of which have different levers available.

The key roles of government should be to:

- Ensure that everyone is able to contribute in some way to society.
- Take an active role to play in redistributing resources, supporting innovation and setting and enforcing standards. It is not sufficient to simply stand back and allow the market to operate.
- Act as change agents, as for example with public health policies where smoking in public places, drinking and driving and not wearing seatbelts were all once held to be acceptable practice.
- Ensure that due consideration is given to the needs and rights of future generations, particularly with respect to environmental protection and financial stability.
- Ensure that human rights are protected and the social contract is delivered. Policies based on a respect for these fundamental rights can make a real difference, for example the opportunities provided to the landless poor by land reform in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka states in India.

What can we do to help our governments?

Perennial complaints made against governments of all complexions include insufficient funding, too many bureaucrats and uncaring or corrupt politicians. In practice, government often has little power and it is not easy to deliver their strategies, despite the levers available to them.

Governments have become increasingly paralysed and incapable of the implementation that is expected of them. They are not always responsive to new ideas and become increasingly defensive and managerial. As people become increasingly bitter and disengaged, the social contract increasingly shows all the marks of a dysfunctional relationship. All governments are facing significant pressure on their financial resources, with aging populations leading to an increased demand for health and elder care, the need for a rapid environmental clean up and the high levels of government debt to be repaid. There is an urgent

Case Study 9

New York State Office of Mental Health, USA

Rethinking a government approach in New York state

Recognising that its outreach programme for bringing homeless people off the streets into permanent housing was not effective, the government authorities in New York City decided to totally revise its practice. Despite spending $17 million a year on 17 different contracts, only 30 or so individuals were being housed each year, resulting in a net cost of about $500,000 per person, whereas one local agency, without any government funding, was housing 100 people a year.

Existing contract holders could not change the way they did things without losing money, so the entire portfolio was rebid down to four contracts, retaining the same level of budget but using a performance contract driven by needed results for housing the homeless. This proved successful and street homelessness was reduced by 50 per cent in three years, whereas previously it was still continuing to increase.

need for non-governmental groups to help government make its resources go further, to do the right thing and help ease their sense of paralysis.

What role does civil society have to play?

Civil society in all its various forms has a key role to play in relation with government. Some of the main elements of this role are:

- Not losing faith that government can work.
- Helping governments to do the right thing, putting forward practical solutions including social enterprises that avoid the need to constantly beg for funding.
- Being constructive in offering viable alternative courses of action, rather than simply criticising or blaming.
- Providing additional resources for governments by enabling them tap into citizen capabilities which can provide multiple sources of capital – the spirit in a community, money and intelligence. This is done by helping communities recognise the needs of homeless people as theirs, rather than some remote government agency.
- Recognising that government has to work in partnership with other parts of government and itself has problems in delivering.

In many countries the problems faced by civil society are not simply those of inadequate government expenditure or bureaucracies, but rather the corruption of the political process itself, with the elected government having no wish whatsoever to deliver its side of the social contract. Corruption pervades all levels of government hierarchies and is particularly hard to address at the local level, where it can be a serious impediment to any approvals needed. With corrupt governments it falls to civil society to remind governments of poor people's rights to social and economic equity. Civil society in India is beginning to question the level of corruption, where payouts can typically reach 35 per cent of total project costs. There is an opportunity at the panchayat or village level in India for real democratic control.

Case Study 10

Gram Vikas, India

Justice and dignity

Gram Vikas (GV) was established in 1979 to bring development opportunities to the poor and marginalised sectors of the rural population of Orissa, India. It runs a variety of programmes, successfully demonstrating how communities can be involved in the sustainable and affordable development of their own community infrastructure and housing. This holistic approach starts with the provision of water and sanitation and moves on to the self-funded development of housing. Over 300,000 households are involved with GV programmes and with the creation of opportunities in rural areas, urban migration is effectively reversed.

Gram Vikas also plays an important advocacy and lobbying role in encouraging national, state and local governments to take their responsibilities to poorest people seriously. In a country where 14 per cent of GDP goes to subsidise the rich and only two per cent to the poor, GV has successfully worked to ensure that the poorest households have the right to decent housing and have access to housing loans at the lower repayment rate to which wealthier households are entitled.

More: www.gramvikas.org

Case Study 11

The Trust for Village Self Governance, India

Self government and prosperity for all

Local government at the village (panchayat) level can be a powerful tool for development in rural India. The work of the Trust for Village Self-Governance in Tamil Nadu, led by Mr Elango Rangasamy, has received national recognition for the work that it is doing to help local people participate in the development of their villages; repairing roads and schools, building houses, rainwater harvesting and taking part in the Gram Sabah meetings which monitor the elected representatives. An innovative housing model is provided in semi-detached units with lower and upper caste poor living alongside each other. The model has spread to over 250 villages and a casteless society is beginning to emerge, especially amongst the young people.

The local people are motivated by the success they are achieving and have now turned their attention to income generation. Training and skills development have enabled all households to improve their incomes through a variety of small businesses, such as cereal processing, food making, engineering, tailoring and small manufacturing industries. It is planned to link 25 to 30 villages, together in a special economic zone in order to generate increased prosperity for all.

More: www.ivcs.org.uk/IJRS/April2009/social%20entrepreneurship.pdf

7. Self-help, empowerment and social enterprise

Key messages

- The welfare support model offers few opportunities for self-help by marginalised and vulnerable people and traps them in dependency on government welfare programmes.
- Enabling marginalised and vulnerable individuals and communities to feel that they belong to society is more than providing housing, credit or social welfare. It involves enabling people to contribute to society as citizens.
- Supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups to establish social enterprises helps build confidence, breaks the cycle of dependence and gives an opportunity to contribute to society.

There is an important distinction between 'power over' and 'power to'. Power over is how we traditionally think about power, i.e. using rewards, punishments or manipulation to force someone to do something they do not choose. Even when it starts with good intentions, there is always the danger that it will become exploitative and unjust, as there can be no 'power over' without relative inequality. Individual 'power to', on the other hand, is synonymous with empowerment and includes feelings of self-control and the ability to define one's own life. It is the power to choose.

Originally established with the highest of motives, the welfare model of giving help to those persons in need is very strong in countries of abundance, where highly developed welfare industries channel state funds through a variety of services and programmes to poor, marginalised and vulnerable people. With few opportunities for self-help, marginalised and vulnerable people typically become dependent on welfare programmes, further losing their self-confidence in a progressive downward spiral. This welfare model is now increasingly recognised as being under severe pressure. Not only are the costs of delivering it increasingly unaffordable, even in the wealthiest societies, but more importantly it does not always offer a permanent improvement to the quality of life for those it seeks to assist.

Encouraging and developing the skills for a more self sufficient lifestyle amongst marginalised and vulnerable groups and individuals helps to eliminate the future need for charity or welfare. Where there are communities of marginalised people, empowering the communities rather than individuals establishes a greater base of knowledge and social mobility, as well as drawing on the strengths of cooperation and mutuality.

There are several barriers to overcome in encouraging a culture of self-help and empowerment. Firstly, the process of becoming stronger and more self-reliant can be difficult to initiate. This is particularly the case for those facing absolute poverty and living hand to mouth, or those overwhelmed by severe addictions. Typically there needs to be some outside intervention at the beginning to help lift people up to a certain level. That intervention usually comes from government, civil society or via donor support. Help is necessary in getting the process started but care needs to be taken to ensure that it does not become a paternalistic solution. It is vital to ensure that people can be part of the long-term change in their life.

A second major barrier is the deeply entrenched attitude found amongst some welfare professionals, that people should be viewed as beneficiaries, clients or service users rather than individuals or friends. The detachment of today's professionals is the very opposite of the Ghandian model of living amongst the people, where immersion in the local situation and community provides a greater understanding of the situations faced by individuals and communities and helps build bonds of trust and friendship. Those in power can feel threatened by self-help movements or by the increasing independence of those who were formerly dependent on them. Often the strongest support can come from those who have been through the same cycle of despair themselves and can talk of the benefits from personal experience.

The case studies below from Poland and South Africa provide examples of how skills training and a social enterprise approach can help to strengthen marginalised individuals and communities.

People do not change their minds with a winning intellectual argument; they change their minds when they come into contact with a working alternative. The mind is changed by the heart and not vice-versa. The points below are drawn from the experience of those who have established working alternatives, which challenge conventional welfare approaches.

Case Study 12

Barka Foundation for Mutual Help, Poland

Restoring people and communities

The Barka (meaning lifeboat) organisation was established in 1990 by Barbara and Thomas Sadowski to help the many destitute and homeless people in Poland meet their housing and employment needs after the collapse of the communist system. Using its philosophy of encouraging mutual self-help, it now provides homes for 1,000 or so persons in a variety of community homes, hostels, private flats and one-family houses and through its various housing, education and vocational training programmes has assisted over 50,000 people in the last ten years. It has established 25 income-generating enterprises to date, as well as restoring two redundant large state farms and pioneering organic agriculture. Partnership working with local municipalities and businesses has created sustainable employment opportunities and the various activities undertaken by Barka over the last 20 years have had a major influence in facilitating the emergence of civil society and social enterprise in post communist Poland. Barka is increasingly being asked to work in large European cities, helping destitute East European migrant workers, either to return home or settle into their new society.

More: www.barka.org.pl

Case Study 13

Tshwane Leadership Foundation, South Africa

Entrepreneurial self-help

The Tshwane Leadership Foundation (TLF) works in partnership with churches and local communities to create better communities in the changing cities of South Africa. In the beginning it sought simply to be present amongst the most vulnerable, standing alongside them in solidarity; then it began to develop communities of care, empowerment, and justice. An important role is to imagine the alternatives and bring them into being, unlocking people's potential in the process.

TLF addresses social and human development in the broadest sense, including housing and income generation. It has created a private company to help deliver social enterprise opportunities and bring people back into communities, particularly young girls who have taken to prostitution and older homeless persons. Buildings abandoned after white flight are used by TLF's social housing company to provide 1,200 dwelling units, as well as community facilities for a broad range of activities, many of which are focussed around the creative and performing arts, including a city festival where 5,000 people come together to celebrate diversity of the city and all the changes they have been through. An entrepreneurial self-help approach is recognised as being the most successful and appropriate in these newly emerging communities.

More: www.tlf.org.za

Case Study 14

Healthabitat, Australia

No survey without service

Over the last 10 years Healthabitat has improved over 6,500 existing homes of Indigenous Australians in 170 urban, rural and remote locations. Not only has this brought about a 40 per cent health improvement (in the area of infectious disease as measured by hospital admission data), it has also improved the skills and self-esteem of the residents and increased understanding of the lifestyle and housing needs of Indigenous Australians. Unlike the conventional perspective that indigenous people are themselves the problem, often trashing the houses built for them, Healthabitat sought to understand the cultural perspective of the community and recognised that poorly constructed and often inappropriately designed homes had been provided in the first place. Training provides people, some of whom cannot read or write, with the necessary skills to improve the safety and health of their homes and Healthabitat ensures that 75 per cent of people that it employs are from the local community.

A priority is to ensure that there is an immediate change to the living environment on the first day of any project and that repairs are carried out promptly. Healthabitat's philosophy of 'no survey without service' means that the community can have real improvements to their homes, in return for participating in all aspects of the project. An indigenous housing guide, derived from experiences of working in people's homes, is now accepted practice in all states and ensures a nationwide understanding of how such housing should be built.

More: www.healthabitat.com

Lessons learned in pioneering new models

- Early projects are always the hardest to get going as there is no proven success to show and encourage others. A lot of work needs to be done and progress made before people will begin to take an idea seriously.
- Initial demonstration projects help to show that the real changes can be achieved. This is especially important where talking and meetings are more common than action, where even a little thing will have an immediate impact.
- Outside partners and resources will be needed in the early stages, as both money and expertise are needed as the project finds its feet.
- Identify local resources with a thorough audit of what is available – both in terms of materials and people's capacity. Gathering strength in numbers will help overcome opposition.
- Keep it simple and just get on and do it, ignoring entrenched power bases. If nothing else it will flush out sources of opposition!
- Identify priorities for action with the community or individuals involved and seek to achieve small wins quickly to maintain enthusiasm.
- Have the legal tools in place to address discrimination and encourage positive action if needs be and recognise that right wing media can present a considerable threat.
- No survey without service is a valuable principle. This helps establish credibility and trust with marginalised groups whose views are sought frequently but often with little or no result. Any service carried out alongside the survey, however small, helps to develop trust.
- Articulate advocacy emerges as people build their skills and become more articulate. This can be used in the political arena, in demonstrations, in theatre / arts or in making friends with the media – according to what is appropriate.
- The best strategy for addressing stigma has been shown to be coming into contact with the marginalised group.
- Get the local community involved in collecting evidence of the impact of the project.

Social enterprise has proved to be a valuable tool in enabling marginalised people to solve their own problems. It enables them to confront their own mysteries, earn a living, create jobs, control their environment and determine what outside help they need. Whilst not a solution for all, the social enterprise route is a proven alternative to the existing welfare model, providing purpose, increasing resilience and facilitating contribution to society.

Key factors in establishing social enterprises

- Work in collaboration with marginalised groups to ensure that there is a common commitment to developing an active way forward.
- Ensure that careful preparation is carried out to be confident the enterprises do not fail, with appropriate training in business skills, market testing etc.
- Prepare local communities to support the enterprises and help create opportunities for the emerging enterprises.
- Provide initial capital and get some models working to ensure that there is something to see and give confidence / inspiration to others. Ensure access to longer term capital sources.
- Invite government ministers to see what you are doing in order to shape new supportive policies. Look wider if needs be, for example to European funding opportunities.
- Establishing the media as an ally will be particularly beneficial in terms of gathering local and national support.

8. Recommendations for action

The key recommendations drawn out from the meeting are targeted on those responsible for delivering welfare support systems, both at strategic and local level. They have been broadly divided into those for governmental and civil society organisations, but recognising that successful new approaches will only emerge at scale when there is greater cooperation between them.

In all cases it is important to:

- Prioritise the development of a sense of belonging and the quality of personal relationships as key measures of success in any welfare support system for marginalised and vulnerable people.
- Encourage professional welfare workers to focus on the individual capacity and abilities of marginalised and vulnerable people, as well as those areas of need where support is required.
- Improve the opportunities for self-help by marginalised and vulnerable people using a variety of social enterprise routes: thereby helping them to break out of increasing dependency, as well as facilitating a greater sense of citizenship and contribution.

For governmental organisations

- Identify possible ways of establishing a bridge between the well-established formal systems of care and support and the natural 'informal' systems, without losing the integrity of each.
- Draw upon the resources offered by civil society, both in terms of the successful projects and approaches pioneered, but also through the mobilisation of civilians' capabilities to help deliver change.
- Identify successful examples of good practice in the voluntary, private and public sectors and seek to create an enabling policy environment to encourage the scaling up of these practices.

For civil society organisations

- Help governments to do the right thing, putting forward practical solutions, including social enterprises that avoid the need to constantly ask for funding.
- Be constructive in offering viable alternative courses of action, rather than simply criticising or blaming.
- Provide additional resources for governments by enabling them tap into citizen capabilities which can provide multiple sources of capital – the spirit in a community, money and intelligence.

9. Participants at the meeting

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