The challenges for Community Development in the South African Context:
A Need for Professionalization?

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Abstract:
The focus of community development practice is social justice. Community development intervention from a social justice paradigm is predicated on the empowerment of individuals, families, groups and communities to be active participants in the transformation of their lives, communities and society. The four critical pillars of human rights, equity and fairness, empowerment, and sustainability provide the foundation for community development intervention that seeks to entrench the principles of democratic participation, engages the voices and values of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and communities at all levels of policy making. This paper critically examines the underpinnings of professionalization of community development practice which encapsulates these pillars of community development and seeks to build a socially just society. What are the challenges and opportunities, what forms of alliances and partnerships enable the creation of an inclusive professional body that is accountable and credible?

1.   Mihi
Greetings from the land of the Long white Cloud: Aotearoa New Zealand.

I am child of Africa who has lived outside of Africa for more than half of my life, having left as a young man in my twenties. During this time I have lived worked and practiced my career as a community development academic and community development practitioner in Australia and New Zealand for 27 years. During this time I have also been involved in international work at various levels including being on the Board of Directors of both the International Association for Community Development [AICD] and the Community Development Society [CDS] from 2001.

I have had the privilege of coming South Africa a number of times since 1994 and engaging with a number of professional colleagues at the universities, government departments and the community and non-government sectors for the last 17 years. I have learned quite a lot about the evolving nature and

context of community development practice in Africa including South Africa and Zimbabwe during these years.

It is these years of engaging with many of you here and some who have moved on to other countries and locations around the world, together with my accumulated experience of previous years of professional practice, academic research, teaching and engagement within respective countries and with colleagues at the international level that I would like to reflect on with you during the three days of this Summit. It is what informs me on how I think we could collectively engage with the challenge of forming a professional association of community development workers in South Africa.

So let me start from the premise established by the theme of your summit: *Building Vibrant, Equitable and sustainable communities.*
What do we mean by the concept of building vibrant, equitable and sustainable communities?

2.   Building Vibrant, Equitable and sustainable communities?

The underpinnings of building communities consist of sets of guiding concepts that inform the creation of comprehensive strategies and programmes that connect communities' economic, social, political, spiritual, cultural and environmental needs and opportunities. Effective community building process requires the effective engagement of all partners in the development process, namely individuals and families who are the primary target of any form of development intervention, governments at all levels, the business or market sector, and the community and philanthropic sector.

This approach to community building places particular emphasis on the role of partnerships and how partnership creates community capital as the engine for social transformation. The term social transformation in the context of community building relates to the recreation and reconstitution of communities' social, cultural and economic relationships through the dynamic processes of communities' self-evaluation, self- assertion, self-reliance and self-determination particularly for the powerless and marginalized groups.

Transformative community building moves beyond the narrow approach to development intervention which has for too long unduly focused on 'poverty

reduction' defined as meeting the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. Development intervention from a community development paradigm as conceptualised in this paper, is predicated on the empowerment of individuals, families, groups and communities to move beyond the basic needs approach. That is why the emphasis on social justice is founded on the four pillars of human rights, sustainability, reduction of inequality through equitable allocation of communities' resources (what is traditionally referred to as fairness), and recognition and enhancement of community identity, security, and values (empowerment).

This I believe is what each one of us at this summit seeks for our communities when we use the term 'building community'.

So now I turn to our understanding of community development.

3.   What then is community development?

The practice of community development has evolved over thousands of years practice in Africa and other countries, including western European countries (Chile, 2007:36; Shirley, 1979:11). However, it has become formalised as an academic discipline and professional practice in western and European countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia only since the 1960s-to-1970s.

In the United Kingdom for example, community development profession evolved through a series of discreet practices ranging from advocacy for the poor, urban renewal work in the inner cities, and work with marginalised and oppressed communities such as immigrant communities in specific neighbourhoods to address their needs. This work became professionalised in the 1950s and 1960s but was embedded within social work and adult education "primarily focused on the case work approach, with its 'emphasis on confidentiality, professional detachment and clinical relationship towards the individual client'" (Popple 2006:7). Community development has since moved beyond this clinical social welfare approach.

In Aotearoa New Zealand community development practice became professionalised in the 1970s after it was introduced into the official

government policy in the 1930s through funding programmes to programmes ranging from "arts, sporting clubs, voluntary associations, racing clubs --- [that] enable the growth of high calibre and highly skilled practitioners" (Chile 2007:53).

In its evolution as professional practice, community development has been referred to among many other terms as a 'concept', 'intervention', 'process', 'outcome', an 'approach' and often things are said to be done in the 'spirit of community development'. It is this 'identity crisis' that has led to the most recent attempts to pin a definition on it. Amongst the various definitions the Budapest Declaration (2004) is often referred to as the 'essence' of community development. This declaration was conceived at the 2004 International Association of Community Development conference.

> Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identify and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organisations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies (public, private and non-governmental) to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. It has a set of core values/social principles covering human rights, social inclusion, equality and respect for diversity; and a specific skills and knowledge base. (Budapest Declaration, 2004:2)

To take account of these recent developments in academic and professional practice two colleagues and I agreed that community development needs to emphasise the contributions of both its professional practice and the fact that it is increasingly taking on the features of academic area of study with its own body of knowledge, albeit drawn from a number of other traditional subject areas. We therefore defined community development from the two perspectives.

> Community development as an academic discipline is concerned with the critical examination of how the forces of structural change, economic integration, institutional development and renewal impact on the capacity of individuals, groups and communities for self-determination.

As an area of professional practice community development intervenes through distributive and collective strategies to enhance social justice and economic equity between groups and communities locally, nationally and internationally. These are achieved through strategies that seek to increase the skills and capabilities of people to act on their own behalf to transform their communities through participation in economic, socio-political and institutional developments. (Chile, Munford and Shannon, 2006:400)

Community development from this paradigm therefore focuses on building communities that are firmly established on principles of social justice. This is what I refer to as 'building communities of justice'.

Communities of justice are built on principles of equity and fairness, principles of human rights, principles of empowerment, and principles of sustainability. These four principles constitute what I refer to as the four pillars for building sustainable healthy communities.

From a community development paradigm therefore, community building is not simply a technical process. It is multi-dimensional requiring a range of skills, competencies and knowledge base. These skills, competencies and knowledge base are derived from a wide range of both traditional and emerging academic and professional disciplines such as economics, environmental science, planning, political sciences, public health, sociology, theology, among others. Similarly, community development principles are increasingly being used across a wide range of professional areas including business, engineering, health promotion, medicine, and politics. Even transnational oil and mining companies such as Shell and Rio Tinto now employ community development workers to help them more effectively engage with their communities.

So what do international experiences of community development practice professionalization inform us on how to approach this in South Africa?

4.   International community development Associations

There are a number of international associations that bring together community development practitioners to form networks and liaise amongst themselves. You will note that I stated these are associations that bring

practitioners together rather than association of professionals. The concept of 'professional community development' continues to be a challenge in many countries (Chile 2007). While a number of countries are working towards accrediting community development as an area of professional practice, most have not been very successful. Despite the long history of community development practice as I have stated earlier, and the use of the term in many jurisdictions, Hawley (1970) for example argued that while the term 'community development' was used in the United States from about 1935 it was only from about 1948 that the term was "used to designate an area of professional or semi-professional specialisation in a number of 'helping', 'programme' or 'problem-solving' occupational fields" (Hawley, 1970:124).

5. The debates surrounding professionalization

However, in most of these countries forming professional associations was riddled with challenges as there were tensions between the need for setting professional standards and what many community workers termed professional capture. In New Zealand for example many community workers, particularly those in the community and voluntary sector 'equated professionalism with elitism' (Nash 1998:278). In Ireland Gallagher and O'Toole suggested that the process was hampered by:

> a lack of internal unity, fragmentation across qualification levels, diverse client and administrative settings, a changing role and exclusion from key policy making structures within bureaucratic professional hierarchy of state welfare services (Gallagher and O'Toole 1999:83).

In Australia the formal recognition of community development work within government departments occurred in the early 1970s, although its professionalization has faced similar challenges. Kenny (1996) and Ife (2002) argue that 'professionalism is contradictory to community development' (Ife 2002:277) because of the perception that professionalization would 'squeeze out of community development job market' (Kenny 1996:107) those without formal qualifications through registration and certification. The argument then is that professionalization privileges knowledge acquired through formal training over knowledge acquired through experience.

These arguments are understandable although not acceptable. They are understandable because of the origins of community development practice from popular communitarian movements undertaken primarily by volunteers from diverse backgrounds rather than paid workers with unified professional codes. Knowledge and skills from this perspective are therefore collectively created between practitioners and clients, and therefore should be shared for the mutual empowerment of all practitioners and clients. However, these arguments are predicated on the neo-liberal western model that sees education as private rather than public good. So my personal position is that community development needs to be professionalised, but the process needs to be inclusive rather than inclusive.

Furthermore, community development practice intervenes in the lives of some of the most vulnerable in society and its practice requires to be taken seriously if the long-term sustainable transformative outcomes for individuals, families and communities are to be achieved. Development intervention is not something that happens naturally without careful planning. The ad hoc nature of development intervention is one of the primary reasons why community development intervention has not been as effective, and long-term sustainable in many communities. Professionalization provides opportunities for coordinated approaches between various actors, government departments, philanthropic and statutory funders, the private corporate and business sectors, and members of the communities to more fully understand the approaches that provide greater potential to deliver effective development outcomes that are long-term, sustainable and meet the needs of individuals, families and client communities.

The debate surrounding professionalization of community development work must move beyond the simplistic understanding of the concept of 'profession' which distinguishes between 'paid work' (job) and unpaid work (voluntary) which focus on 'the worker' rather than the protection of the interest of the community. Such arguments tend to be based only on distinction between pecuniary rewards and altruism. Nor should the debate about privileging expertise and restricted access to professions detract from setting the highest

possible standards of practice that advance accountability to communities and on-going professional development that ensures ethical practice.

As we work towards the professionalization of community development in South Africa we must recognise the multiple-dimensions of community development intervention, at the individual, family/group, community, organisational and society levels. Professionalization must not be limited to meeting the needs of only one or two of these dimensions.

I will return to this in my concluding remarks. But my briefly describe the international scene and ask you to reflect on how we could use this to inform how we move forward into the future.

6. International community development Associations

I mentioned earlier that there are a number of international associations that bring together community development practitioners to form networks and liaise amongst themselves. Many of these associations evolved from networks of individuals, organisations and institutions at national and regional levels seeking mutual support in response to the growth of government and private philanthropic funding towards poverty-focused causes in the United States, United Kingdom and Europe. These associations came out of the desire of many of individuals and organisations working in a range of areas seeking to share 'good practice' especially because of the tension between the need to respond to the needs of the poor, and the need to be accountable to the funding organisations. Networks of organisations provided opportunities for practitioners to work through ideas and strategies that enabled them transcend the oppressive structures of the state and powerful funders.

Initially most of us were located within other professional associations, such as social work, counselling, psychology, urban and regional planning, public administration, etc. In New Zealand for example community development has been buried in social work through the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Work [ANASW]. The degree programme that I helped to develop and set up at UNITEC Institute of Technology in 1997 for example had three majors in Community Development, Counselling, and Social Work.

However, as there is no official professional association of community development all graduate of this programme who major is community development have to go through the accreditation process for social workers. So initial [first] accreditation for the programme in 1997, and the subsequent accreditation processes up to the time I left at the end of 2004, and today have been through the Social Work accreditation process. So our community development graduates have no independent identity or practice, unlike students who graduate in the Counselling Major who are accredited through the New Zealand Association of Counsellors [NZAC].

This lack of professionalization minimises the role of community development work in individual, community and societal transformation. It marginalises the growing body of community development knowledge that has build from a long history of trans-disciplinary approaches that address the complexity of the multiple dimensions of community development intervention that I outlined earlier. The lack of professionalization also undermines the integrative nature of community development practice which privileges the community's wellbeing in a holistic way rather than the disjointed, ad hoc and often competitive approach of other practices.

I strongly urge you not to go the same pathway as New Zealand but to follow the path that Ireland, Australia and the United Kingdom, are starting develop.

As community development practice finds its identify it must also start to distinguish itself from other professions to which it was linked to historically for professional identity and/or training, such as social work, adult education and agricultural extension.

National and international associations such as the International Association for Community Development IACD, the Society for Community Development (SCD) emerged at the international level from the 1970s to represent and advocate for the interest of practitioners and their client communities. These associations themselves were not immune to the challenges faced by practitioners at the nation-state level. The IACD for example was almost torn apart by internal crisis in the first ten years and by

the beginning of the 1970s was almost moribund for nearly 20 years. The briefing papers that we received in 2006 during my second three-year term on the Board of the IACD for example stated that:

> The IACD has been active since 1952 in supporting community development on international stages on global basis. As an organisation it has experienced times of strength and times of weakness. We are currently in a rebuilding phase. In 1999 the IACD was re-constituted with a democratic charter and the Secretariat moved to Scotland, where we are now registered as a non profit company. (IACD 2006:1)

More recently the IACD has promoted itself as:

> the only global network of practitioners and activists working towards social justice through community development approaches. We are a not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation with members in more than 70 countries worldwide. Our aims are to promote community development across international policies and programmes, to network and support community development practitioners and to encourage information and practice exchange. IACD has recognised NGO consultative status with the United Nations. (http://www.iacdglobal.org/)

The IACD is very much an international association with members across many countries and its governance/management board also drawn from a wide range of countries. However, its major challenge has been the fact that it has not followed the basic principles of community development which is to build from below. Only in the last few years since 2004 have national associations of the IACD been formed, but these are very slow to grow as the international structure has not nurtured them, rather focusing on regional groupings.

The IACD does not have an independent journal to advance its body of knowledge and developments in theory, but it is actively linked to the *Community Development Journal* published by Oxford University Press since 1966. It has been described as the preeminent journal in the field. It has an International Editorial Advisory Board of which I have been a member since 2001. Some of my major activities have included editing a Special Issue of the Journal focusing on community development practice in bicultural context, Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as other activities of the journal.

Other regional associations such as the Society for Community Development (CDS), a US-based entity also lay claims to being 'global associations'. Formed in 1969, the primary focus of the CDS was to create a 'professional community development association to explore sources of funds, and to take other action

towards the establishment of a professional association' (Cary, et al 1989:6). While the initial intentions for a world-wide association were not expressly stated, moves in 1976 to change the name of the association from CDS to Community Development Society of America (CDSA) were resisted and in 1978 the name reverted back to CDS. To ensure the global reach, CDS board of directors were recruited from across the world, and the editorial board of the CDS journal also expanded to include academics and practitioners from outside the US. I was elected to the Board of the CDS in 2002 at the CDS conference at Mississippi Delta State University Cleveland Mississippi for a three-year term.

The CDS publishes an academic journal, the *Journal of the Community Development Society* first published in 1970, and has become one of the authoritative journals in the community development profession. It also publishes the *Vanguard* which focuses on sharing stories of good practice from the field.

In addition the CDS has annual conferences and once every two years the CDS and IACD organise joint biennial activities to coincide with the IACD biennial conferences that bring members together to exchange ideas and debate new theoretical insights. The most recent conferences were in Lisbon (2011) and New Orleans (2010) and the 2012 CDS conference will hold from July 21-25, at Kingsgate Marriott at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Over the two decades 2000-to-2010 a number of other community development associations emerged, some as regional groupings of the IACD, others strands focusing on specific aspects of community development such as community economic development. While the term has a number of derived meanings, it generally refers to what Peter Kenyon, and Australian community development practitioner describes it as "a sustained and untied effort by the whole community to improve their local economy and quality of life by building their capacity to adapt and benefit from global economic changes, local people taking responsibility for their economic future". As a social entrepreneur with strong interest in community development, Peter Kenyon's approach to community development focuses on building community assets. He developed the 'Bank of I.D.E.A.S.' [Initiatives for the

Development of Enterprising Action and Strategies] as a response to the decline in Australia's rural economies, and creating opportunities for what he refers to as 'rural survival'. The focus of community economic development includes creating educational and employment opportunities for young people in rural areas by actively engaging young people in building their economic futures. Other aspects of his work include building assets of indigenous communities.

7.   What priorities for professionalization of Community Development Practice in South Africa?

Although some authors have tended to associate community development in Africa with colonisation, this is misleading and does not reflect accurate understanding of African development practice. What is now termed community development has been part of our African and other indigenous communities every day practice before European colonisation. Self-help, community mobilisation, prioritising the communities and their perspectives in all aspects of development is our natural way of being. Taking a holistic approach to social, economic, spiritual, cultural, political and environmental wellbeing has been part of our practice. It was colonisation that upset the balance in this holistic approach to African development.

Thus western European writers associated community development with the emergence of European foreign aid to Africa to address issues of underdevelopment, particularly poverty and illiteracy. They argued that community development was not required in western countries because defined in this narrow perspective, the process was concerned primarily with interventions to address poverty, which many western writers suggested did not exist in their jurisdictions in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus the evolution of community development in western European countries is often associated with 'democratic practice' in terms of political participation. Hence western intellectuals such as Miles argued that:

> The main intention of community development in a developed country like Britain
> is to bring democratic processes up to date, refine it, and carry it to logical
> conclusion on the contemporary scene (Miles, 1974:14)

Africans are absolutely fine with claiming ownership of community development because we have been doing it for thousands of years.

As I argued in previous works (Chile 2007; 2006; 2004), the role of community development in enhancing democratic participation is not peculiar to western democracies. All forms of government seek popular participation, whether that is through regular periodic voting, communicating development objectives, processes and outcomes, or other forms of civic participation. Thus calling particular forms of practice professional does not necessarily make them superior to others that don't have the same labels. We do not have sufficient time for me to go into a detailed analysis of the practice of community development in Africa. I hope that the work that Margie, Gary and I will be doing over the next year or so will provide opportunity to write this into one or two chapters of the book we are planning.

The critical question for us at this stage is where do we derive our mandate for the professionalization of community development in South Africa? And how should we go about this?

8. Mandate for Professionalization of community development

I argue that we derive our mandate firstly from the people that we work with. As I stated earlier in this presentation, development intervention into the lives of the most marginalised and vulnerable individuals, families, groups and communities in society demands that only those who have professional accountability should undertake such interventions. And that accountability lies first with these individuals, families groups and communities.

Secondly, the government of South Africa has stated very unequivocally that community development practice needs t be undertaken by professionals. Former President Mbeki's State of the Nation Address on 14th February 2003 gave the government's mandate for professionalization of community development when he stated the need to create:

> multi-skilled community development workers (CDWs) who will maintain direct contact with the people where these masses live --- so that we sharply improve the quality of the outcomes of public expenditures intended to raise the standards of living of our people.

While this referred to the creation of community development workers within the structures of local authorities, it is a clear mandate from government of the recognition of the need to professionalize community development practice in this country.

Thirdly, the mandate is derived from our practice as community development workers. Unlike many other professions that pride themselves on distancing from their clients, community development practice operates from a values base that seeks to address power imbalances in society, and bring about social transformation that is founded on social justice principles of equity and fairness, human rights, empowerment, and sustainability. These values demand a knowledge and skills base that support practitioners, provide a code of ethics that establishes the framework for accountable practice, and also protects the clients, and sets standards for what constitutes good practice.

Furthermore, the multi-dimensional nature of community development practice combined with the political activism imbedded in development practice demands a professional association that supports practitioners, advocates for them and also works closely with structures of power to enhance the legitimacy and profile of community development practitioners. This is particularly important as the complex nature of the issue of accountability. For example, the association will work to set measures of accountability that relate to the various stakeholders, such as clients (individuals, families and communities that are subjects of interventions), the funding agencies who provide the financial and other resources that enable the interventions to take place, the organisations that employ the practitioner because invariably they are accountable for the outcomes of intervention; and professional standards that requires the practitioner to operate within specific ethical and regulatory environments.

Without a professional association community development practice will not gain the credibility it deserves, will continue to be governed by professional bodies that have only limited understanding of the depth and complexity of community development practice.

9. What structure for the Professional Association?

The lesson from the international experience is that careful attention should be given to the issue of accountability, legitimacy and empowerment as we work through the professionalization process. Community development builds from the ground up, rather than from the top down. The structure of the association should be developed so that community development practitioners are grounded in local ethics, where they build their credibility, networks and resources to address local issues and empower local communities. This demands that as we work through this process, we must walk the talk of our profession to empower members to be active participants in the transformation of their lives, communities and society. This is achieved best by actively engaging their voices at all levels of policy making.

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