

Community and Economic Development

Key Concepts

Community and economic development is that sustainable and united effort by a community to utilise their social, human and physical and find more resources to enhance their local economic and employment opportunities and quality of life.

It is often about local people taking responsibility for their future. It is about changing perspectives and choices regarding development options, community resources, markets rules and decision making capacity.

It is based on a simple premise that each community has within itself or within its grasp considerable capacity and opportunities to influence its social, economic and employment future.

By its very nature, community and economic development involves:

- focussing on the stimulation of opportunities that will generate additional income and jobs, while preserving and enhancing the dynamics and features that make the local community special
- actively involving local people in decision making about their economic and social futures
- seeking the development of more resilient, durable and diversified local economies
- encouraging the use of development processes that are compatible to the aspirations, needs, values and resources of the community
- emphasising a 'holistic' approach to development, seeing the social, cultural, environmental and economic aspects as interrelated dimensions of the community
- emphasising specific action to achieve desired goals

- encouraging collaboration and partnership between the public, private and community sectors
- educating community members about the local economy and economic development processes

Community and economic development (CED) involves a local community in actions such as:

- identifying their competitive advantages
- helping existing businesses improve productivity and profitability
- attracting more money into their community
- keeping money circulating in their community and plugging leaks
- understanding existing markets
- exploring and identifying new market possibilities
- identifying new development opportunities
- creating strategic alliances between key groups
- increasing the net number, quality and variety of local jobs

Key Ingredients for Success

In the field of community and economic development, there are communities which make things happen and those which flounder. Studies identifying the key ingredients for successful community and economic development emphasise the importance of the following five key factors:

1. Positive Attitude, Belief and Expectation

This involves such community attitudes and behaviours as:

- a positive mindset where hope and optimism prevail
- a proactive attitude to change
- a 'can-do' spirit and self help mentality, rather than a dependence on 'the cavalry' from outside
- a commitment to quality and excellence in business and community life
- a focus on the 'half full part of the glass'
- a willingness to invest local dollars, resources and time
- a willingness to experiment, make changes, take risks and encourage possibility thinking
- strong community pride
- regular celebration of creativity and achievement

2. Participation, Inclusiveness and Collaboration

This is illustrated by:

- a strong sense of identity as a community
- strong broad based resident participation and involvement
- encouragement of diversity in every dimension
- a participatory approach to community decision making
- co-operation between the public, private and community sectors
- effective communication mechanisms within the communities
- an ability to positively manage community division
- the integration of economic, social, cultural and environmental objectives
- willingness to work with other communities and outside agencies and resources

3. Local Leadership

This can be judged by the existence of:

- the presence of a core of local leaders committed in terms of time, priority and belief in the notion of local economic development and possessing the appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes to manage change
- development of home grown talent
- an ongoing process of identifying, recruiting and skilling local leadership through a local strategy and development fund
- the encouragement and acceptance of women in leadership roles
- the active involvement of young people
- welcoming and integration of newcomers

4. A Strategic Approach to Planning and Action

Important dimensions in this include:

- development of community vision and a community action plan
- the establishment of appropriate locally based organisation to manage and facilitate development efforts
- the research and prioritisation of the range of development options
- a realistic appraisal of the feasibility of potential opportunities
- continuous identification of resources
- mechanisms to maintain local interest and involvement beyond the first rush of enthusiasm
- the evaluation and adjustment of the action plan on a regular basis

5. Opportunity Obsession

This involves a combination of:

- continued alertness to new opportunities
- continuous mapping and linking of community assets

- never ending search for best practice processes, development options and resources
- continuous monitoring of available resources
- mechanisms that foster idea generation and exchange
- the marketing of one's community as a vibrant and 'can-do' entity
- an ability to respond quickly and positively to new opportunities