

Unit 3

Community Development: Principles and Practices

“Rural development is the participation of people in a mutual learning experience involving themselves, their local resources, external change agents, and outside resources. People cannot be developed. They can only develop themselves by participating in activities which affect their well-being. People are not being developed when they are herded like animals into new ventures.”

Julius Nyerere, 1968

In Newfoundland and Labrador, there is a strong foundation for locally-led regional economic development. Early efforts centred upon jobs, resources, and infrastructure. They were, however, in direct response to crises, such as the resettlement program of the 1960s. At times like these, people’s distrust of their leaders led them to take matters into their own hands. These early activities form the background of recent efforts of the citizenry to control its own future. However, current efforts reflect a desire to do so through productive partnerships with the provincial and federal governments.

Defining Regional Economic Development

In discussing regional economic development, we should clarify what we mean by the term. We have always associated it with either *top down* or *bottom up* approaches to organizational development: either the government or the people took the initiative. Unfortunately, both approaches have so far met with limited success: neither has achieved its goals, resulting in the disappointment of all concerned. This disappointment and the blame that has resulted are responsible for the distrust that may still linger between Government and development agencies.

Without a clarification of expectations and the role of each participant in the regional economic development process, it is difficult to analyze previous development attempts and formulate future objectives. Firstly, though, we should define some basic concepts and establish the principles of community development.

- a. *Community Development*: The United Nations defined the term as a process whereby the efforts of Government are **united** with those of the people to improve the **social, cultural, and economic** conditions in communities.

Community development requires the **participation** of those who represent various interests and the willingness of Government to form partnerships with groups.

- b. *Community*: According to *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, this is a "group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society" or a "body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests" (226). A community may be one or several towns or a group of people having a specific mutual interest, for example, the cultural community.

The following definitions apply to terms as they have been traditionally used:

- c. *Rural development*: Community development in parts of the province outside of more densely populated urban areas.
- d. *Regional development*: Community development in geographical areas having boundaries consistent with those identified in 1992 in *Change and Challenge: A Strategic Economic Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*. These boundaries were refined in *Community Matters: The New Regional Economic Development (Report of the Task Force on Community Economic Development in Newfoundland and Labrador)* in 1995 and through community interventions. Earlier, regional areas were those covered by the Regional Development Associations (RDAs).

Principles of Community Development

1. Community development is a holistic approach to addressing the community's needs.

Community development encompasses the social, cultural, and economic aspects of society.

- a. People are of primary importance in social development. According to the U.N. mission statement on social policy and development, our objective should be the "building of secure, just, free and harmonious societies, offering opportunities and humane standards of living for all." Indeed, every person has the right to be nourished, to be adequately housed and secure, and to work, and governments should include people in decisions that directly affect them. The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Social Plan is the result of broad consultations on the subject of social issues. Many submissions revealed that citizens were preoccupied with the availability of services and employment. The Plan puts forth a framework for social development which proposes new directions on these issues. The participation of communities is now necessary for its implementation.
- b. We have seen major growth in the development of our cultural community. In recent years, we have witnessed a proliferation of artists gaining international recognition and of poets, authors, and musicians. The increase in the number of local theater productions, festivals, and archaeological and historical developments as well as recent growth in the film industry have generated an awareness of who we are as a people.

This growth and recognition is advantageous for several reasons. Firstly, cultural activities attract people to our towns both on a short-term and long-term basis. Secondly, identity may form the basis of an outward marketing strategy, making it easier to sell homegrown products. Thirdly, in acknowledging our unique collective identity, we become prouder of who we are and invest in ourselves, our future, and our own products, generating even more local employment. The

community's cultural agenda is leading to partnerships between the community and Government to effectively raise our self-esteem and prepare us to become more culturally entrepreneurial.

- c. Community economic development is a citizen-led process dedicated to improving lifestyles by sharing wealth, reducing poverty, and generating employment. Activities relate to the providing of infrastructure in support of business development, which is defined as the practice of a commercial activity associated with the production, supply, or distribution of commodities for profit.

2. Community development is a process.

Community development is not just an activity but a set of activities that the community pursues in a systematic way over an extended period of time. It is a *process* that is continuous, guided, and adheres to a set of general principles. The community, on the basis of widespread participation, develops a vision to steer the process. The vision must be realistic, achievable, and compelling enough to challenge and motivate people to take action. It must also provide for benchmarks so that the community can measure and report on progress. There is a need for community education about organizational development, decision-making, strategic planning, and business development and for partnerships with resource people and other agencies. The process is interactive and assisted by "animators" (experts in developing organizational and operational processes).

3. Empowerment comes from widespread community influence, participation, and community education.

Citizens must pursue their own community development. Citizen involvement in determining the community's priorities is the foundation for addressing development and change strategies.

There is a need for citizens to develop decision-making processes and to commit to courses of action together. Widespread participation also enables those who are entrusted with leadership roles to act on the community's behalf with confidence. Community development is about empowerment and true participation through communications, knowledge exchange, decision-making, education, and the application of agreed upon courses of action.

4. Development plans must ensure environmental stewardship.

Environmental stewardship requires planning. The community must pursue partnerships to protect agricultural lands; ocean resources; ecosystems; forests; clean, fresh water; and a healthy environment. Development encroaches on the environment. Therefore, we have a responsibility to ensure that any resource exploitation has minimal negative impacts.

5. Development results must lead to sustainability.

Sustainable development depends on two major factors. The first priority should be to ensure that people have continued access to the basics of life. Secondly, resource development must be undertaken using sound management practices which ensure that resources are not depleted faster than the earth's ability to replenish itself. Conservation and restoration must be considered a normal cost of doing business. Developments that include the earth's nonrenewable resources should be undertaken only to the extent that the supply for future generations is ensured.

6. Partnerships provide access to the necessary resources.

Community development is about partnerships. According to the U.N. definition, the efforts of Government are united with those of the people. While the community may well initiate organizational efforts, some of the resources needed to solve the issues are not found in the community or are controlled by the government. This creates a need for partnerships with governments, business, education and training institutions, and all other community-based organizations pursuing community development objectives.

Models of Community Practice

In his paper entitled “Three Models of Community Practice,” Jack Rothman suggests that there are three orientations of community change: *social action*, *social planning*, and *community development* (cited by Shragge 2). We have observed characteristics of each in social and economic development associations in the province. In fact, the manifestation of opposing elements may be partially responsible for the conflicts occurring as a result of the implementation of education reform and in health care.

The *social action* approach supposes that a disadvantaged segment of the population becomes organized and takes action. The group makes demands on the larger community or governments for better treatment, improved services, or basic changes in major institutions. It seeks a redistribution of power, resources, and decision-making authority in the community and depends on radical intervention to redress injustices. The leaders are usually activists who are motivated by a single cause. They use conflict as a means of finding solutions and see their opponents as the enemies. Examples of this are found in the civil rights movement, the labour union movement, women’s liberation, and student movements, starting in the 1960s and continuing into the 1990s. RDAs initially relied on this approach in gaining recognition of fishing rights and in opposing the government’s resettlement program. Today’s reactions to the cod moratorium and the seal hunt reflect a renewal of the *social action* approach.

The *social planning* model favours a technical approach to solving community problems. It presumes that social scientists are best qualified to identify problems and that only planners and technicians can find solutions in a complex industrial and social environment. These professionals supposedly use their skills to manipulate information and to guide change to deliver goods and services to a disadvantaged public. Building community capacity or fostering change is not seen as a central part of this model.

This approach has not been popular with the community, since direct involvement in identifying problems and solutions is minimal. We may find examples of this practice in many government departments and agencies, in social and urban planning authorities, and in community welfare and health planning organizations. Many of these agencies believe that the community has limited skills and capacity to undertake sophisticated decision-making related to important issues. While the community may be mobilized, this mobilization is usually designed to obtain support for decided upon courses of action rather than for building partnerships for the design, delivery, and evaluation of programs. The *social planning* approach is losing popularity in favour of the third model.

Community development presumes that community change can be pursued through a model of public participation. People are mobilized to plan, make decisions, and sit in partnership with governments and others to find solutions to social and economic issues facing the community. This approach is based on the principles that people know best what is good for them and their participation and expertise are useful to find solutions. Outside expertise is considered a resource to the people rather than to the product. The principles of democracy, voluntary involvement, self-help, planning, and community education are important in this model.

While the early actions of Rural Development Associations were consistent with the *social action* model, the intervention of Memorial University's Extension Service and the Department of Rural Development helped in the transition to a model consistent with *community development*, also referred to as *rural* or *regional development*. We will discuss this approach in the next section.

Regional Development Associations

It is difficult to say who initiated community *economic* development efforts in this province and when they began. It may have been the local roads boards combining meagre government resources with sweat equity to maintain community roads or the community responding to family or institutional needs, such as the building of schools. In any event, Newfoundland and Labrador communities have a long and rich history in community economic development. Moreover, they always understood the connection between social and economic development. In fact, economic development occurred when governments provided funding to address social issues.

In the late 1960s, the combination of a resettlement program and a changing economy, as a result of access to employment opportunities outside the fishery, led to rapid growth in community economic development. Citizens organized the first Rural Development Associations in the province during that period. People in smaller communities, who saw their way of life threatened by out-migration and a perceived lack of attention to fishery development, realized they would have to take action. After many long battles, efforts by the local RDA on the Great Northern Peninsula led to deep sea trawlers being prevented from fishing near shore and eventually to the federal government establishing a 12-mile fishing limit. In Fogo, the RDA reversed the tide of resettlement when the people on the island decided that they could secure a living from the fishery by establishing a fishermen's co-op.

Soon communities on the Port au Port Peninsula, on the Eastport Peninsula, and in the Greater Lamaline area of the Burin Peninsula saw citizen-led organizations as a means of overcoming high unemployment, underdevelopment, and community instability. These early efforts depended heavily on confrontation tactics due to a lack of formal recognition of the groups involved and the fact that the community agenda was completely contrary to the government's resettlement policy. While the government promoted an industrial development agenda with centralized communities and services, people still wished to stay in smaller communities and pursue more traditional lifestyles.

Memorial University of Newfoundland's Extension Service was the first to support these efforts. Through its very active field staff, the university assisted with processes that led to community consensus-building, the establishment of organizational structures, and leadership development. The agenda gradually changed from a "pressure tactics" approach to a more concerted effort at identifying community and regional strengths.

Government Recognition of Rural Development

In 1972, the provincial government recognized the efforts of community groups and restructured the Department of Community and Social Development, with responsibility for resettlement, into the Department of Rural Development. The new department provided organizational and financial support to the emerging RDAs. It also instituted a loans and business support program designed to assist rural businesses and help entrepreneurs start businesses that built on opportunities existing in rural communities.

The rural development movement grew and prospered in the 1970s and 1980s. From the initial 4 or 5 organizations in the late 1960s to 16 associations in 1974, the number of RDAs steadily grew. After government recognition and the accompanying access to funds, the number increased until there were 59 associations by the mid-1980s. Government insisted that RDAs develop long-term plans in consultation with the communities and then implement them. However, a lack of technical support and the failure of the

plans to address systemic problems in local economies resulted in these planning exercises being viewed as little more than “shopping lists” with limited long-term value.

These plans also lost their importance when RDAs recognized that the demands from individual communities for development infrastructure and basic income support far outweighed the commitment to long-term, sustainable development. This was accentuated by the availability of easy money from governments for “make work” projects. Even those groups and organizations which sincerely tried to pursue long-term development initiatives were affected. The lack of long-term employment opportunities in an economy dependent on the fishery resulted in more and more “make work” money going toward building more fish plants. The community groups saw the development of the fishery as the area that provided the best opportunity for development.

Efforts Toward Sustainable Development

While the community needed short-term employment, some RDAs did champion development initiatives that had long-term benefits. The RDA in Upper Trinity South began breeding rainbow trout. Similar long-term development efforts took place in Bay d’Espoir (finfish breeding and grow-out), on the Port au Port Peninsula (scallop farming), and on the northeast coast (mussel farming). On the Labrador coast, the RDAs were responsible for the development of winter trails. The RDAs and the Department of Works, Services and Transportation still share responsibility for the development and maintenance of the trails. Numerous tourism developments and forestry and agriculture projects, which RDAs spearheaded and private entrepreneurs commercially developed, exist throughout the province.

Probably one of the greatest accomplishments of RDAs was the growth in the number of credit unions in the province. In southern Labrador, the local development association, with support from the Labrador Fishermen’s Union Shrimp Company, set up the Eagle River Credit Union. This happened when the local bank decided to leave the area. Today, this enterprise has in excess of 20 employees and four offices on the coast and on the Northern Peninsula. Citizens repeated this type of venture in Twillingate, Carmenville, Eastport, St. Anthony, and in other communities around the coast. The restructuring of support to cooperatives and credit unions in 1990, as part of the establishment of Enterprise Newfoundland and Labrador, led Government to withdraw support for credit union development in the province.

Whether RDAs should initiate and facilitate development or strive to create and run businesses posed a dilemma. Conflicting messages from Government about the need to generate local operating revenues tended to affect their mandate and undermine their approach to community development. The role of the RDAs should have been to generate ideas and support those more suited to operating businesses. Instead, the search for alternative sources of funds put them in competition with the business community, causing them to lose their valuable support.

The failure of the ground fishery in the early 1990s resulted in the closure of many of the fish processing facilities developed in smaller communities. This created a crisis for the communities and their development agendas. People saw the need to explore other community strengths in search of economic development opportunities. Tourism seemed to provide some hope for development and soon became in the 1990s what the fishery’s development had been in the 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, the diversification of the fishery and the utilization of other species of fish became a necessity and provided positive results. The failure of our fishing resource thus created a need for diversification and an urgency to explore other potential development opportunities. Since this was mostly a business approach, the RDAs saw little role for themselves in this area.

Community Futures Committees: A Federal Attempt

In 1986, the federal government established a number of Community Futures Committees in keeping with a reorganization of its labour market programs. Each committee established a Business Development Centre (BDC) that acted as its financial arm. Community Futures Committees appointed the members of the boards of directors for the BDCs on the basis of their legal, accounting, administrative, and business skills.

Before long, the Community Futures Committees produced long-term or strategic plans for the regions they represented. There were now organizations that could undertake the planning and others that could undertake the implementation of projects. However, since there were no formal links between the Community Futures Committees and the RDAs, there was no reason for cooperation. In fact, the conflict that existed between both groups was detrimental to development partnerships. In the end, the strategic plans developed by Community Futures Committees were left on the shelf without any group to champion their implementation.

There were other problems as well. Community Futures Committees were not accountable to the communities they represented. In an effort to ensure the participation of the “movers and shakers” in the region, the federal minister of Employment and Immigration at the time appointed the members of the boards of directors. Consequently, the community did not see them as its representatives. On the other hand, members of the boards of directors of the RDAs were democratically elected from the community at large. However, these boards were viewed by some as being flawed because of the lack of formal representation of groups and organizations that had a major impact on economic and business development.

In 1995, the Community Futures Committees and the Business Development Centre boards combined into Community Business Development Corporations, and the Community Futures Committees, as originally set up, ceased to exist.

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