

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by – FRANKIE MacLENNAN – 2001 Churchill Fellow

To investigate the revitalisation of rural communities through strategic planning and community group facilitation skills

Churchill Fellowship Report of Frankie MacLennan 2001.

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2. INTRODUCTION

The fellowship was to investigate the revitalisation of rural communities through strategic planning and community group facilitation skills. The focus is on the role of the facilitator in integrated **Rural Community Development (RCD)**, which takes an economic, social and environmental systems approach.

“**Facilitator**” in this context ranges from the specific role of session facilitator in community or group single events held for planning through to the person who works as a “change agent” or catalyst with a community or in a region over a period of time.

This Churchill Fellowship was undertaken in the context of rural decline of which the symptoms are ageing communities, especially farmers, youth leaving rural areas for opportunities in the city, increasing poverty and declining rural services.

My current work is in Sustainable Regional Development with the Department of Natural Resources and Environment which is a partner in the Alberton Project, and other rural development projects in Victoria which are based on the Nebraksa model of RCD.

3. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Special thanks to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for the opportunity to undertake such a special study tour.
- The Department of Natural Resources and Environment, particularly the management in Gippsland for supporting this study tour and encouraging the dissemination of information on my return.
- All those key contacts overseas who gave so willingly of their time, their hospitality and generosity with their own networks, especially Charlotte Narjes in Lincoln and Pascale Moretty in Macon.
- To many work friends and associates who assisted with contacts overseas.
- To my referees for their initial and ongoing support and encouragement.
- To my husband Graeme for prompting me to apply for the fellowship and to my family for keeping the business and household functioning during my absence.

4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The fellowship aims to facilitate the revitalisation of rural communities through enhancing strategic planning and community group facilitation skills and gaining knowledge of how other rural communities are pro-actively managing change.

The fellowship covered 10 weeks, visiting France, Ireland, Toronto in Canada and Minnesota and Nebraska in the USA.

Rural Community Development is clearly on the political and social agenda. There were many programs in place to build capacity and to stimulate rural enterprise and there was an awareness of the necessity of managing change in rural communities.

Ireland, Minnesota and Nebraska are experiencing similar rural trends to Australia with declining farmer numbers.

However in both Ireland and the USA, rural living is on the increase.

EUROPE

In France the focus was on the role of sustainable agriculture within a viable rural system and looking at ways to promote this to the broader community.

In Ireland and in France, European Union programs focussing on sustainable rural development and rural innovation and diversification were studied, with a particular emphasis on their facilitated delivery.

Irish RCD workers are at the forefront of integrated (that is economic, social and cultural) rural development and are well educated in what is a relatively new field.

Rural enterprise is seen as a vital part of a thriving Ireland, even if that meant relying on non-farming income to keep the family on the farm. There was strong government support for diverse rural enterprise.

There was a strong EU framework, in policy, funding programs and regulations in France and Ireland.

NORTH AMERICA

In Toronto, two short courses – Advanced Facilitation and Community Development Intensive - at the Institute of Cultural Affairs were an opportunity to concentrate on skill development. To be trained by the very experienced facilitator Jo Nelson was a fellowship highlight.

Minnesota was the site for the International Community Development Conference, which was a chance to :

- hear academics and practitioners from around the world expound theories of RCD and strategic planning concepts;
- hear stories of success and challenges;
- network and make contact with like minded people.
- Facilitate a Learning Station – “Do we have the right skills to do the job?”
- Undertake a post conference tour to study rural enterprise in Minnesota.

Nebraska focussed on the Partnership for Rural Nebraska (PRN) and the Center for Applied Rural Innovation (CARI) which have extensive experience in showcasing their RCD programs and philosophies. Spending time with John Allen from CARI was inspirational.

A recurring theme was the shift in rural thinking towards stewardship of the land: that rural life meant a production agriculture base which nevertheless was declining and more responsibility in the future would be on landholders as stewards of natural resources.

In France, Ireland and the USA, there were many facilitators who were taking innovative approaches to their work. Particularly impressive were those working in strong partnership contexts and those who were integrating the social, economic and environmental aspects into projects.

My conclusions affirm that current Victorian RCD programs that are integrated and not solely economic, that are bottom-up and capacity building in their approach, are on the right track.

5. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

5.1 RCD programs must be integrated, not just economic in focus. The most common model was social, economic, cultural (including environmental). A more appropriate rural model is social (including cultural), economic, environmental. The first step is to build capacity. Rural communities are complex and are multi-dimensional as identified by many organisations visited. A simple, one focus approach will not be sustainable for the community in the long term.

5.2 RCD programs must have a local, bottom-up or grass-roots approach. Top down has been tried and failed. Image change must come from within the community.

5.3 Rural areas have an enormous diversity of enterprises : one size or one idea certainly does not fit all. This calls for a diversity of programs. In both the USA and Ireland, the focus was on integrating rural community programs alongside production agriculture programs. In RCD, stewardship of the land is clearly on the agenda alongside production agriculture.

5.4 Competition at any level of RCD is not constructive and does not empower. John Allen's depiction of the "traditional path" based on how needy, impoverished or depressed a community is in competing for resources is contrasted with the "alternative path" where communities assess their strengths and assets as a means for developing a shared vision, building community relationships and identifying opportunities.

Program processes need to be based on a collaborative ethic rather than a competitive environment. Any process which sets communities up to compete with each other is demoralising and is not aligned with the spirit of asset based RCD.

5.5 Farm families will be the future mainstay of sustainable rural communities.

The Cork Declaration supports the notion that "agriculture is and must remain a major interface between people and the environment, and that farmers have a duty as stewards of many of the natural resources of the countryside."

Corporatisation of agriculture will not result in rural communities which are socially and environmentally sustainable. Leaving agriculture to market forces will not result in an agriculture that is sustainable in social and environmental terms.

Sustainable agriculture plays an integral part in sustainable rural development. A sustainable farming system is a system which is economically, socially and environmentally viable in the long term.

So one of the challenges for Australian Landcare would appear to be the need to foster the concept of sustainable ecosystems as a part of sustainable agriculture which in turn contributes to sustainable rural communities.

POLICY

- 5.6 A strong policy framework is needed to support regional coordination of projects and on ground enterprise to achieve viable rural communities. Agricultural and Rural policy need to recognise the interdependence of the rural and agricultural sectors. In fact, it also needs to recognise the urban interdependence. Kate O'Dubhchair from EU Rural Policy suggested that all national and regional policies need "rural proofing". It is a concept where all government programs are assessed through a rural screen for implications and impacts (positive and negative). The future of rural communities should not be left to market forces.

FACILITATOR ROLE

- 5.7 When citizens feel in control of their destiny, innovative, inspiring growth and change can happen. The concept of image transformation is fundamental to RCD. If a community can change the image of what is possible and what they are responsible for, a transforming empowerment can occur. There is great power in participative planning which creates a possible future for citizens to work towards. In the best examples, communities were facilitated through a process to focus on their unique assets and to start a dialogue at the local level for identifying opportunities to use those assets.
- When a community creates a shared vision, recognises its assets, sets strategic directions, develops achievable actions and celebrates its success, it is a self sustaining community.

We need people who have facilitation and strategic planning skills to help this happen. Facilitators play a vital role in catalysing this process.

- 5.7 Facilitators of RCD are catalysts for community members to "meet" each other, find common ground and aspirations, break down prejudices and assumptions and build working relationships. So the work of the facilitator is to intervene or stimulate existing social fields in order to build the social capital. This may involve very simple techniques such as "pot luck" or community get togethers.

PARTNERSHIPS

5.9 RCD is best based on strong collaborative partnerships between agencies, NGO's and local organisations. A partnership reduces duplication and develops trust in communities that all agencies are working in their interests.

The Partnership for Rural Nebraska has :

- a vision for local, state and federal groups to work together to stretch resources and benefit more Nebraskans. A close working relationship is passed on to those working together in the region.
- A vision of educating each other on available resources and research and development needs.
- A single entry or contact point for requests, loans etc.
- a partnership based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between federal, state and the university. The MoU was seen as a way of formalising the partnership so that the collaborative spirit was modelled from the top down. The MoU identified areas of overlap and became a vehicle to build trust at all levels of rural policy and rural projects.

5.10 RCD is a complex area where intervention requires diverse methods and responses. One organisation or program will not suit all situations. So there is a need for many players in RCD. Some programs will have an economic focus, some a social focus and some an environmental focus. However, these players must know each other's strengths and communicate and collaborate for the best outcomes for rural communities.

We must know which organisations public, private or voluntary and which individuals, are involved in a particular project – who is at the core and who is at levels of involvement, support or awareness. A strategy for involvement at the appropriate level is essential.

5.11 The role of the region is a conduit for facilitating the dialogue between the global (whether is it Commonwealth or State) context of policy, program development, funding and the local level where the RCD action is happening.

It is the role of the region to :

- facilitate the recognition of assets,
- facilitate training,
- give regional direction,
- adapt programs to suit regional differences
- facilitate interchange - sharing what is working in the region. This includes facilitating regional professional networks.

6. DISSEMINATION OF LEARNINGS

These major learnings will be communicated within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, at a regional and statewide level. My report will be circulated and information sessions will be held in Melbourne and in Gippsland. In my Sustainable Regional Development role, I will have ongoing input to NRE's statewide and regional RCD programs.

In NRE, RCD is delivered through the Sustainable Regional Development (SRD) Program. An information session will be held for SRD staff.

In Gippsland, a network for Community Development Service Providers exists for information. My report will be circulated to that network.

The Alberton Project Partners Group will have a briefing regarding my major findings and the Yarram Standard News is covering my fellowship findings.

I will continue to regularly facilitate strategic planning with a variety of community groups in Gippsland, employing the techniques learned as a result of the fellowship.

Training of community facilitators in Gippsland is already underway and this is part of the ongoing commitment to regional capacity building for service providers.

7. PROGRAM – ORGANISATIONS VISITED

French Farmers Association – rural development programs Serge Tisserant, Paris France	DATAR – French Dept of Agriculture – LEADER program Fanny Labarthe, Paris France.
Claude Richard FARRE – Integrated Farming Systems Paris France	Marie Jose Nivet FARRE (Forum de l'Agriculture Raisonnee Respectueuse de l'Environnement) Maison de l'agriculture Bourges
FARRE – Pascale Moretty Chambre d'agriculture, Macon France	Jean Tatin and Chantal Wilks Quincy, farmers
Gerry Gunning Rural Development Irish Farmers Assoc. Dublin Ireland	Michael Heanaigh, Donegal County Council County Development Board Lifford, Donegal, Ireland
Don McSwiney Enterprise Ireland, Letterkenny Donegal.	Fionula McGeever Inishowen Partnership Company, Buncarra, Donegal
Gillian Havlin Inishowen Rural Development EU LEADER Group	Andrew D'Arcy and Ivan McPhilip Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
Martina Maloney, Galway Corporation – County Development Board	Ruan O Bric Udaras na Gaeltachta – Regional Development, Galway
Maria Henegham, John Whiriskey, Rural Development Services, Teagasc (Irish Agric & Food Devel Authority)	David Fluegel, Community Program Specialist, Centre for Small Towns, Morris, Minnesota.
Jo Nelson, Institute of Cultural Affairs, Toronto Canada	John Allen, University of Nebraska Charlotte Narjes, Centre for Applied Rural Innovation
Vicki Luther, Heartland Center for Leadership Development, Lincoln Nebraska	Cliff Kumm, Extension Officer Rural Development, USDA, Beatrice, Nebraska
Randy Gunn Resource Conservation and Development USDA Nebraska.	Doug Gibbs Nebraska Rural Development Commission, Lincoln
Jo Lowe Nebraska Rural Development Network	Amy Larrick, Community Builders, Nebraska Rural Development Commission
David Taladay South East Nebraska Development district	Linda Fettig Nebraska Economic Development Field Officer
Lance Hedquist City Administrator South Sioux City Nebraska	Jon Bailey Center for Rural Affairs, Walthill Nebraska

8. KEY LEARNINGS

8.1 FRANCE

I visited Paris and central France with a focus on the role of sustainable agriculture in a viable rural system.

Main programs and areas studied were:

- the FARRE program, a forum for sustainable agriculture which aims to educate the public about how sustainable farming systems operate. The marketing of an environmentally responsible agriculture was seen as essential risk management.
- French farmers who were concentrating on diversification and co-operative systems (from marketing and production to technical education).
- FNSEA – the French Farmers Association and rural development programs
- The European Union (EU) LEADER program which fosters community initiatives for development of the rural economy.

Only 3% of the French population are now farmers which is 664,000 of which 450,000 farm full time.

To be a professional farmer and receive subsidies, training and certification is mandatory.

Amalgamation of farms is widespread and intentional.

There is an increasing emphasis on leasing which is very regulated.

The Farmers Organisation (FNSEA) strongly supports programs which enhance the link between urban and rural and increase understanding of where food comes from and its quality in France.

FNSEA supports the need for integrated farming models which are broader than just production agriculture. There is a need to include stewardship and community.

There is widespread dissatisfaction for direct incentives to farmers for production. There appears to be a need for subsidies to be linked to whole systems so there is a rural community benefit.

The French word for facilitator is “animateur” or “animatrice” is the feminine form : this means literally to animate or bring to life, to bring into being.

FARRE is an excellent program for a variety of people to see, experience and understand how food is produced and for forging links between urban and rural sectors but it needs to go further. It may be more effective in the long term if its charter was part of the policy framework for how agriculture needs to be environmentally responsible. Other participating countries are Germany, Britain, Sweden, Luxembourg and Italy. They have just produced a “Common codex for Integrated Farming” which aims to pursue the adoption of clear, common rules for integrated farming systems.

Currently participation is voluntary. Self diagnostic processes are being developed for each industry, covering fertiliser, water and soil management, animal husbandry, biodiversity as well as socio-economic factors such as participation in educational activities, membership of environmental organisations and knowledge of legislative frameworks.

Farmers in FARRE were promoting sustainable farms as part of Sustainable Agriculture which is integral to Sustainable Rural Development.

Jean Tatin and Chantal Wilk produce Quincy Blanc, an award winning sauvignon blanc from their 20 hectares of vineyards. They have come from being grain growers to sharing a wine maker with other growers in the region. Vin de Quincy is sold worldwide over the internet.

The EU LEADER program is a program developed by the Agriculture and Rural Development Policy section. The aim is to develop some rural business successes which demonstrate to other rural communities what is possible. It is a bottom up approach which encourages innovative local group action. Support comes mainly in the form of finance with some business assistance. It aims to stimulate diversification in the rural economy and to create employment. With all LEADER's good intentions, many local people saw the program merely as a source of funds for one's business if one was willing to submit to the required, complex procedures. Facilitators saw their role as much more complex. They played a strong networking, technical assistance and capacity building role in rural communities.

Lunch during the French Farmers Reference Group meeting : we adjourned to the nearby Maison des Vins – a restaurant showcasing local wines - and were served a magnificent bowl of Beef Bourignon accompanied by the regional wine, Macon rouge, followed by the local goats cheese. A bit different to the traditional tray of sandwiches eaten around the meeting table in Victoria.

8.2 IRELAND

In Ireland, my time was spent in the north west – Donegal and Galway where the economy is not based primarily on agriculture. Main programs studied were:

- The EU LEADER program – at board and local level.
- The Irish Farmers Association rural development programs.
- County Development Board 10 year Strategic Plans – Galway and Donegal.
- Udaras na Gaeltachta – rural development with an Irish cultural emphasis.
- The role of the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology in RCD.
- Rural Development Services of Teagasc (Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority)
- The Cork Declaration : A Living Countryside, developed at the European Conference on Rural Development, 1996.

Currently there are 130,000 farmers in Ireland, dropping by 4% per annum. Projections are for all full time farmers in 20 years to be dairy farmers. Consolidation into larger farms is a pattern, along with small towns growing into rural living zones with more people commuting long distances to work.

A friend has left Belfast to set up a business in a Donegal village. They are bringing pizza and cappucino to rural Donegal for the first time and the locals love it. Her children attend the Irish school and are Irish-English bilingual.

The Cork Declaration : “A Living Countryside”

www.rural-europe.aeidl.be/forum/forum2/corde-eu.htm

This is a declaration for sustainability of European rural life.

It was developed in the context of the decreasing economic importance of farming, the increasing importance of stewardship of the land and in recognition that rural areas offer unique lifestyle opportunities in the European Union.

It is mindful that agriculture is and must remain a major interface between people and the environment and that farmers have a duty as stewards of many of the natural resources of the countryside.

We had been speaking of cultural lead recovery. “The Irish pub is everywhere now,” said Edna. “You take the singing for granted. Enya’s sister lives just down the road and we have a good old sing in the pub.”

EU has recognised that rural communities need more than agriculture to thrive. The aim is to keep people on farms in a viable way – whether through increased commodity production, value adding or off farm income.

There is a recognition that active programs are needed to catalyse:

- retirement of older farmers
- recruitment of new farmers.
- agritourism
- value-adding

Teagasc (the Agriculture and Food Development Authority with the responsibility for providing advisory, training, research and development services geared to the agriculture and food industry **and rural communities**) has a Farm Tourism Specialist trained in Rural Community Development. Her job is to keep in contact with the rural tourism sector and to train Rural Enterprise Advisers to promote agritourism and encourage farmers to develop agritourism enterprises or Community Rural Tourism Groups.

So the farm extension service now encourages rural communities to improve income through rural tourism. This also takes the form of product development for tourism : health holidays, sporting activities, farm activities, heritage and cultural activities, educational experiences and of course, accommodation.

Along with the more predictable diversification into niche markets, farmhouse and cottage food, farm forestry, crafts and small businesses associated with the farm, the business of ecology (renewable energy, waste recycling, environmental education) and sport horse production are also on the agenda.

Teagasc, in partnership with training agencies, provides Rural Enterprise Business training in rural tourism and farmhouse cottage foods.

Rural Enterprise is strongly encouraged and showcased through regular events and publications.

LEADER has financed the local radio station in Inishowen, a very remote area of north west Donegal. The station manager was visiting when I was there and took the foreign traveller back to the station to talk about Australian rural communities over the airwaves.

Ireland has undertaken a project to develop and implement 10 year plans in all 34 counties of Ireland through County Development Boards. The result will be the creation of 10 year visions with 5 year strategies. The plans will integrate economic, social and cultural (includes environmental) aspects. There is a central framework which includes an eight step process which is participatory and consultative in nature. Whilst working within a central framework, the approach was local and flexible. The emphasis is on coordination of existing plans and projects and on filling any identified gaps. It was clear that the plans were not merely viewed as plans but as a mechanism for shared action and understanding.

In fact, early in the process, there were unanticipated consequences such as the City of Galway defining itself as a Learning City and planning an annual Learning Week.

Some training of community leaders was in evidence through various programs. The National University of Ireland was delivering courses under contract. Content included such areas as the role of office bearers, the importance of culture, how to delegate and how to conduct a local audit or needs analysis.

Rural Community Development professionals in Ireland are highly educated. Many had Masters degrees in Rural Development or Rural Sociology. Study was generally undertaken after some experience in the field and was strongly supported by employers.

Many workers started as volunteers.

Skills for RCD that were identified in Ireland – in the context of Integrated Rural Community Development being a relatively new career path.

- social policy training
- rural development training
- evaluation skills
- ability to write plans
- ability to read and interpret plans
- ability to understand rural life
- accreditation to recognise these skills.
- hands on experience
- ability to create environment for sharing with other communities
- capacity to re-train
- able to focus on capacity building

There was a movement from single focus development, particularly in the economic area to a more integrated development with a strong cultural focus. This was evident in Udaras, with the Irish Farmers Association and also with the EU Leader program.

“The Barracks”, a project to restore an historic building in the Gortahork village, was celebrating the launch as a cultural, tourist attraction. The speeches were conducted in Irish and English. I was the only person there not fluent in the local language.

Ireland has recognised that despite the Celtic Tiger, something is missing. Despite the incredible economic growth, the Irish sense of connectedness, trust, and social capital are impoverished. In the search for putting communities back at the centre of political debate, the Institute of Values Lead Change has been established. Its task is not to find solutions but to release the self-directedness in communities.

8.3 TORONTO

In Toronto, I undertook two intensive short courses with the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) :

1. Advanced Facilitation. This course builds on the Technology of Participation which is a widely practised facilitation method in Australia.
2. Community Development Intensive: A comprehensive grass roots approach. This included:
 - Assumptions of local CD: human, systemic, interdependent, inclusive, image-changing, evolving, participative, cultural emphasis, respectful and comprehensive (economic, social, cultural/environmental).
 - Key ingredients of successful CD : a specific community, a catalytic core of people exists, methods are participatory, there is community organisation, there are effective linkages, actions are results oriented, learning is incorporated into the project, motivating stories are part of the community efforts and that the CD journey is an evolving one.
 - Theories of Community Development ranging from development dominated by expert elites, to citizen directed development, community based programming to ideologically derived programming.
 - Baseline or start of project activities
 - Gridding for understanding the community
 - Frameworking for planning private, public and local support and involvement.
 - Strategic planning processes including action plans
 - Community organisation and co-ordination
 - Evaluating change in a community.

ICA is at the forefront of facilitation techniques in working with community groups to develop participatory plans. They have extensive experience all over the world in RCD. Their methods are consistent with the Nebraska model.

Jo Nelson : "If you ask people for their wisdom, they think you are wise."

The challenge of this report is to present the role of the facilitator in a broad sense, from the definition of facilitator as the one session catalyst right through to the person who works within one community on a long term basis to catalyse change. So there is the simplicity of developing the competencies of the session facilitator alongside the complexity of facilitation within a dynamic community development project.

ICA has done considerable thinking on the competencies of the facilitator which cover all aspects. The competencies work when "community" is substituted for "group".

A : Engage in professional growth

- Maintain a base of knowledge
- Contrast facilitation methods
- Maintain professional standing

- B : Create collaborative partnerships
 - Develop working partnerships
 - Create and maintain professional, collegial relationships
 - Co-design and customise applications to meet client needs.
- C : Create an environment of participation
 - Demonstrate effective inter-personal communication skills
 - Honour and recognise diversity ensuring inclusiveness
 - Facilitate group conflict
- D : Utilise multi-sensory approaches
 - Evoke group creativity, blending learning and thinking styles
 - Employ multi-sensory approaches
 - Use time and space to support group process
- E : Orchestrate the group journey
 - Guide the group with clear methods and processes
 - Facilitate group self-awareness
 - Guide the group to consensus and desired outcomes
- F : Commit to a life of integrity
 - Ask the depth questions of oneself and others
 - Model profound affirmation.
 - Trust group's potential and model neutrality.

(This list is a summary of the Facilitator Competencies:
 Copyright 1997 International Association of Facilitators; Institute of Cultural Affairs
 USA; the Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs
 Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal – Volume 2, Number 2,
 Winter 2000)

8.4 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA – MINNESOTA AND NEBRASKA

In the USA a month was spent on the following:

- Attendance at the International Rural Community Development Conference in Minnesota. Participants were academics and RCD workers from all around the world. This included the delivery of a Learning Station at the conference : “Do we have the right skills to do the job?” which was based on the Farmsmart skill wheel.
- Post-conference tour in rural Minnesota studying rural innovation with an agricultural base.
- Hosted by the Center for Applied Rural Innovation at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. This included an Orientation Program which introduced the Partnership for Rural Nebraska and a special session for visiting Sustainable Agriculturalists.
- Visited the Heartland Center for Leadership Development.
- Tour of rural Nebraska (notably Beatrice and South Sioux City) studying rural enterprise and rural partnerships.
- Visited the Center for Rural Affairs, a non-profit organisation concerned with the decline of family farms and rural communities.

In Morris Minnesota, the local RCD facilitators brought together local farming entrepreneurs and overseas visitors in an Open Space technology event. Local people were grappling with similar issues to Australia such as

- The need to foster a community based, entrepreneurial, environmentally sound food and farming system.
- The need to build co-operation, collaboration and inclusivity in rural communities.
- The need to cultivate an ethic of stewardship towards agricultural land.
- The need to develop a national farm policy which sustains farm families and rural communities.
- Finding policies and programs which encourage positive behaviours in biodiversity, stewardship, soil and water conservation.

Sweatshirt seen in Morris, worn by a local RCD worker : "What if the hokey-pokey is really what it's all about?"

In the States, philanthropy plays an important role as a resource for a range of community development works. In fact Minnesota's Blandin Foundation has played a lead role in developing the state's rural communities. They have developed eight dimensions of RCD

1. valuing diversity
2. life long learning
3. economic support
4. infrastructure and services
5. environmental stewardship
6. community leadership
7. safety and security
8. recreational and cultural opportunities.

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development has support from the Kellogg Foundation. Since 1983, this organisation has conducted leadership programs with a strong strategic planning emphasis.

"The Sugar Shack" started 6 years ago as the idea of 2 local women to make candles and soap. Now they own 4 shops and a factory in tiny Edgar Nebraska, employing 40 local women.

Siouxland covers a small area as the confluence of Iowa, South Dakota and Nebraska. Locals have responded to the challenge of a complex situation by developing the voluntary Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council (SIMPCO). They hold regular board meetings to plan cooperative projects and resolve issues of common interest. Networking is nurtured with monthly after work social gatherings and a weekly Friday coffee morning.

The role of the facilitator, according to Jim Lewis from the Minnesota Center for Democracy and Citizenship is to design ways to increase levels of knowledge and understanding of each other in the community and one of the most powerful tools is community or issues mapping: meeting places, clubs, skills, power (who makes the decisions in the community), behavioural (who uses the park?) Mapping helps **broaden the base** of citizen involvement. The facilitator is a catalyst in the process – does not get used up but can function over and over again.

The Partnership for Rural Nebraska (PRN) is a model for other states. It functions under a MoU and comprises the United States Department of Agriculture (Rural Development and Resource Conservation), the University of Nebraska (includes extension), Nebraska Department of Economic Development, the Rural Development Commission and the Nebraska Development Network.

The Happy Jack Chalk Mine is a tourist project in Scotia Nebraska – locals have sponsored the steps leading to the lookout where an annual golf day requires players to land the ball in the hole on the island in the river a good 200 metres across the road! Golfers come from far and wide for this challenge.

PRN has a governing board with representatives from each of the partners. It conducts a one application process for rural communities. It has a technical assistance review panel and a Co-operative Development Center (ie a service for developing co-operatives in the community). It has an Education Committee which conducts orientations, holds the Rural Institute annually as well as training seminars. PRN has a shared vision to work together which is passed on to those in the field.

PRN professionals in the field worked together in a flexible way depending on project and community requirements. There were collaborative relationships at the local level, sharing strategic planning skills, economic development expertise, networking, sharing office space and facilities. David Taladay in Tecumseh was working in a Community Development Strategic Planning Initiative, creating “readiness teams” in a community to facilitate RCD projects. (This equates to ICA’s “core” group). This involved a strategic planning process to organise community groups, assess assets, identify issues and develop strategies for the future. This process might take anything from 6 months to years, depending on what the community defines as the “end result”. Importantly, these projects were always facilitated by a partnership approach. David Taladay claimed that his organisation sees itself as offering one part of the jigsaw and always tries to connect with as many partners as possible on a project so that there is a real effort not to duplicate services.

In Allen’s asset based model, the facilitator intervenes or stimulates the social interactions in the community so that changes in relationships and interactions occur.

According to Allen, the skill of the facilitator lies in

- inspirational leadership,
- flexibility,
- the ability to listen instead of talk,
- ability to remove oneself from community relationships,
- to look beyond economics,
- the ability to live with ambiguity and contradiction,
- ability to get different people to lead,
- working in a value based system and
- to trust the community to do what is best for them.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Facilitation

9.1 That facilitation and strategic planning with communities and community groups is valued, recognised and nurtured as a technical skill in any agency or non-government agency or volunteer organisation working with rural communities. An example of this would be incorporating such a discipline into the NRE Graduate program.

9.2 Victorian government agencies commit to training workers in integrated RCD. This is an opportunity to lead with skilled staff in the areas of Rural Development and Rural Sociology. Formal training needs the support of government and the workplace, whether financial or in the form of time allowance. A broader academic base of people trained in integrated RCD will benefit rural communities in the long term.

Government Partnership

9.3 The development of the “Partnership for Rural Victoria”, a collaboration model comprising partners of rural players at state, regional and local levels, brought together under a Memorandum of Understanding. This Partnership develops a single contact point for rural community groups and becomes the first point of reference in regions and sub-regions.

9.4 The creation of the “Victorian Rural Leadership Program” which provides a statewide framework and support whilst building on existing programs and fostering the flexibility to deliver appropriate local programs. Local “new leader” programs are an essential part of RCD and are needed to build confidence and capacity at the grass roots level so that rural communities feel a greater sense of control over decision making which affects them

Policy

9.5 RCD programs need consistent and predictable support from government. Government needs to provide a secure and strategic framework for RCD whilst allowing the flexibility needed for local capacity building. Communities need to feel free to get on with projects in their own way.

9.6 That all Victorian and Commonwealth programs be subjected to a process of “rural proofing” in recognition that many programs are inconsistent with sustainable rural communities and actually have a detrimental effect. This assessment needs to cover social, economic, environmental and cultural programs.

Principles & Values

9.7 RCD program delivery must be values aligned: programs must be delivered in a way that is consistent with the aim of the program. For instance, it is essential to develop processes which are not competitive but support all initiative from rural communities. These guiding principles need to be incorporated into program planning as well as implementation. Catalyst type support needs to be available to all communities which self-select for capacity building. Preferably, programs are

delivered in a decentralised manner with an emphasis on participation at the local level so that community innovation and enterprise is nurtured to flourish.

9.8 Recognition that the integration of rural programs into farmer programs is essential in this context of the decreasing importance of agriculture in many rural economies. "Farmer" only programs disenfranchise local business people who are facing similar change management issues to farmers. This approach is also a demonstration of a commitment to integration of the social, economic and environmental systems inherent in rural communities