

TABLE 1
Select Definitions of Community Development

“The deliberate attempt by community people to work together to guide the future of their communities, and the development of a corresponding set of techniques for assisting community people in such a process.” (Bennett, 1973)

“An educational approach which would raise levels of local awareness and increase confidence and ability of community groups to identify and tackle their own problems.” (Darby & Morris, 1975)

“A series of community improvements which take place over time as a result of the common efforts of various groups of people. Each successive improvement is a discrete unit of community development. It meets a human want or need.” (Dunbar, 1972)

“Finding effective ways of helping and teaching people to develop new methods and to learn new skills. This process is, however, done in such a way as to retain community control and community spirit.” (Frederickson, 1975)

“A process of creating special community organizations throughout society which will be responsible for channeling demands to centers of power, to distributors of benefits.” (Hammock, 1973)

“A process, as a method, as a program, and as a movement; or as a set of purposes.” (Hauswald, 1971)

“The process of local decision-making and the development of programs designed to make their community a better place to live and work.” (Huie, 1976)

“All of the efforts made to establish and maintain human interaction while improving the appropriateness of the physical setting to that interaction. Underlying values to this development are the recognition of the individual’s right to select the extent of community or privacy and the group’s right to identify its own needs for community development.” (Koneya, 1975)

“An open system of decision making, whereby those comprising the community use democratic and rationale means to arrive at group decisions to take action for enhancing the social and economic well-being of the community.” (Littrell, 1975)

“An educational process designed to help adults in a community solve their own problems by group decision making and group action. Most community development models include broad citizen involvement and training in problem solving.” (Long, 1975)

“The involvement of people and the coordination and integration of all efforts directed at bettering conditions.” (Lotz, 1970)

“The capacity of people to work collectively in addressing their common interests.” (Maser, 1997)

“The process which basically initiates and develops structure and facilitates program development that includes users of the program. I identify Community Development in the context of initiating and of developing supportive human relationships.” (Miles, 1974)

“A process in which increasingly more members of a given area or environment make and

implement socially responsible decisions, the probable consequence of which is an increase in the life chances of some people without a decrease in the life chances of others.” (Oberle, Darby, & Stowers, 1975)

“Facilitating those cultural mechanisms that provide for shared experience, trust, and common purpose.” (Parko, 1975)

“A process. Our concern is with the life process -- continuity, adjustment, and fulfillment, and finally the self-sufficiency of the people.” (Pell, 1972)

“The active voluntary involvement in a process to improve some identifiable aspect of community life; normally such action leads to the strengthening of the community’s pattern of human and institutional interrelationships.” (Ploch, 1976)

“The active involvement of people at the level of the local community in resisting or supporting some cause or issue that interest them.” (Ravitz, 1982)

“Many community development efforts are essentially efforts to help community residents understand what is happening and recognize some of the choices they face in order to achieve the future community they desire.” (Shaffer, 1990)

“People who are affected by change participate in making it ... A system provides for communication among all groups in the community, including open discussion of issues, feelings, and opinions. The community understands its problem-solving process and needs no further instruction.” (Vaughn, 1972)

“A situation in which some groups, usually locality based such as neighborhood or local community ... Attempts to improve its social and economic situation through its own efforts ... using professional assistance and perhaps also financial assistance from the outside ... and involving all sectors of the community or group to a maximum.” (Voth, 1975)

“A process of helping community people analyze their problems, to exercise as large a measure of community autonomy as is possible and feasible, and to promote a greater identification of the individual citizen and the individual organization with the community as a whole.” (Warren, 1978)

“A public-group approach dedicated to achieving the goals of the total body politic.” (Weaver, 1971)

“Acts by people that open and maintain channels of communication and cooperation among local groups.” (Wilkenson, 1979)

TABLE 2
Key Characteristics of the Community Development Process

- Participation comes from a broad cross section of the community.
- Deliberations are made on the basis of well-informed participation.
- Decisions are the result of consensus or democratic majority rule decision-making.
- The process purposefully fosters group building, leadership development and capacity building (process objective) as an essential element, while striving to successfully address a substantive issue as well (product objective).
- Processes are largely focused on a purposeful and systematic approach to addressing a local concern(s).
- Community issues or problems are investigated holistically, linking issues and appreciating the complexities of the community in assessing and resolving the issue.
- Processes are flexible and not rigidly structured to only deal with an initial concern.
- U.S. community development processes have a strong reliance on professional staff facilitation and coordination.
- Successful U.S. efforts are characterized as being locally initiated and entrepreneurial, although broad models may be championed by community colleges, state extension programs, or state or regional agencies furthering programmatic agendas.
- The genesis of efforts is often a locally perceived crisis or potential crisis, although some initiatives arise from subtle mandates from broader units of government, opportunities to gain additional resources, or simply the pride of a key champion.
- Greater competition for diminishing resources (and the general “devolution” of government-sponsored programs from broader to more local governments) has thrust communities into situations of coordination and collaboration in order to address important issues.
- The community development process is increasingly being used as the mechanism for integration in these opportunities.

Summarized by Greg Wise, University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension, from articles by forty authors referenced in the Appendices to the report "An EPA/USDA Partnership to Deliver Community-based Education," 1998.