



## **Training and Learning for Community Development in Europe**

**Report of the First Combined European Bureau for Social Development (CEBSD) "Relay" Meeting held in Brussels on January 21-23, 2008**

Chair: Lies Beunens - Samenlevingsopbouw Vlaanderen (Flanders, Belgium)

## **Introduction**

In its first “relay” meeting, representatives of three community development organizations met in Brussels from January 21- 23, 2008 to reflect on the essence of learning and training for community development. This report summarizes the presentations and discussions held at the meeting.

## **Presentations**

1. **Presentation by Lies Beunens** (Samenlevingsopbouw Vlaanderen (Flanders Belgium). Topic: How to identify and assess the needs for training and learning in community development for professional community development workers in Flanders/Brussels

Drawing insights from the work her organization does in the Flanders region of Belgium, Lies Beunens’ presentation focused on the idea of a needs assessment as an approach to meeting the training and learning needs of community development workers. Ms Beunens stressed that a needs assessment simply aims to stimulate community development workers to identify their learning and training needs so that trainers can create courses that meet those needs. By avoiding imposing solutions in this way, a needs assessment approach not only allows community workers to participate in acquiring the skills and knowledge that they need to be effective in their work but also acts as a learning and training opportunity for trainers themselves and their organizations. (See attachment for the paper presented at the meeting)

2. **Presentation by Gianni Orsini** (Fundacio Desenvolupament Comunitari (Cataluña/ Spain). Topic: the role and skills of intercultural mediator in Cataluña and the training needs in order to empower those mediators.

As a core area of his organization’s work, Gianni Orsini made the case that in the multicultural societies that we live in, mediation is an essential tool for community development and for maintaining social cohesion. According to Mr. Orsini, in the Spanish context where the cultural makeup of cities such as

Barcelona is constantly being reconfigured, there is an emerging consensus for the need for “ciudad mediador”.

To be an effective mediator, Mr Orsini emphasized that mediators must know when to enter the process (i.e., when there is a demand for their services) and when to exit from the mediation process (i.e. when a conflict has been positively transformed and parties have reached a consensus solution to end conflict or when a conflict can no longer be mediated).

In terms of skills needed to be effective, a mediator should be knowledgeable in the art of mediation, take a neutral attitude so as to be seen as a fair interlocutor, be a good listener and a good interpreter of verbal and non-verbal language.

3. **Presentation by Carole Dane**, Inter-Réseaux Développement Social Urbain, France. Topic: Shift from individual work for public agencies to social development/collective action: what are the needs for training and learning?

Carole Dane’s presentation assessed the state of community development work in France and offered a valuable analysis of the learning and training needs for community development workers in France. Ms Dane argued that because the French system has historically been one of a strong state with relatively limited input from citizen intermediary organizations in the policy-making process, community development work in France remains a work in progress. (See attachment for the paper presented at the meeting)

### **Discussions**

Discussions were inspired by the individual presentations made by the participants and covered issues ranging from general ideas and principles of learning and training; why learning and training for community development; target groups for learning and training; needs assessment; “skilling up” community development actors according to their needs; and some basic conditions for ensuring appropriate learning and training for community development work.

## **1. Learning and Training for Community Development: Some General Ideas**

To the extent that community development work is about working with a community to build the kind of community that its members want, participants at the relay meeting stressed that learning and training for community development must be a process that is:

- Participatory - i.e. engages with the grassroots agenda
- Creative - i.e. involves thinking “outside the box”; is flexible, dynamic and innovative
- Embraces positive thinking - i.e. considers learning and training for community development as a challenge rather than a problem
- Seeks to empower community development actors for their work in the field and for negotiating with political decision makers
- Enjoyable / Fun-filled
- Sustainable

## **2. Why Learning and Training for Community Development?**

Because society is continuously evolving, participants at the meeting emphasized that learning and training for community development work provides an opportunity for:

- Adult education - particularly for community development workers who want to improve their knowledge and skills on community development
- Sharing best practices on community development
- Inspiration/Stimulation
- Confidence-building
- Vision-building

## **3. Some Principles of Learning and Training for Community Development work**

From their own experiences working as a trainer for community development workers in the Flanders region of Belgium (Lies Beunens), mediator in the Cataluña region of Spain (Gianni Orsini) and as a social

worker with difficult youth in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in France (Carole Dane), participants pointed out that approaches to learning and training for community development will differ from one context to another and from one target group to another. Overall however, the participants stressed that in addition to following training courses, effective learning and training for community development should embrace approaches that:

- Aim to combine theory and practice
- Promote creativity, flexibility and innovation
- Facilitate grassroots participation
- Encourage experiential learning
- Support mutual learning through networking, regular reunions (for example collegial supervision meetings every 15 days) etc.
- Communicate/provide existing and/or new information on community development
- Stimulate writing/publications
- Integrate new media technologies (such as internet research, blogs etc.)
- Aim to have an added value/multiplier effect for community development

#### **4. For Whom? Target Groups for Learning and Training**

In the discussions, participants identified target groups (or community development actors) for learning and training to include:

- Community citizens or local residents involved in community development groups
- Community Development Agents - including social workers, mediators etc.
- Policy-makers involved with government policies and initiatives

Participants noted that these target groups join community work with different levels of experience - some may be relative beginners, others experienced community workers and others with mid-level experience.

#### **5. Needs Assessment**

Given the wide range of actors and themes involved in community development work, participants at the relay meeting stressed that different actors will have different learning and training needs. To meet the different learning and training needs of these diverse actors, participants emphasized that learning and training for community development must be based on a needs assessment - i.e. a “mapping” of what the learning and training needs of community development actors and their organizations are. “Mapping” in this context is, a design to visualize actors in small communities and the strength of their relations of conflict and/or cooperation with one another.

At the level of an individual community development worker, a needs assessment involves answering questions such as: what training do I need to be effective in my work? What are my strengths and weaknesses? Similarly, at the level of a community development organization, a needs assessment involves an organization answering questions such as: what are our competences in a particular area? In what areas do we need to invest to be more effective?

Participants proposed that one useful approach to carrying out a needs assessment is by using an “inspiration list” - i.e. a scheme that may stimulate community development actors to identify their needs with regard to:

- Particular themes – such as human rights, social justice, the environment, etc.
- “Maturing processes” – such as working in groups, how to tackle racism, working with volunteers etc.
- Political issues – including evolutions in the political domain, and lobbying policymakers
- Issues of social development – including the ageing/graying of the population, multiculturalism, Islamization, urbanization etc.
- Conflict Management issues – including mediation
- Personal characteristics – for example, in terms of attitude, communication skills, leadership, coaching skills etc.

## **6. “Skilling up” Community Development Actors According to Needs**

“Skilling up” or empowering Community Development Actors so that they can meet their learning and training needs involves diverse methods, techniques and strategies. Such methods and techniques may include:

- Disseminating theoretical knowledge on specific topics through literature, courses, seminars, workshops, presentations, lectures by keynote speakers etc.
- Contextual analysis or mapping the evolution of events and issues in a particular context
- Using assessment indicators
- Concept clarification
- Ethnography – aimed at generating an “insider’s point of view”
- Writing/publications

Strategies may include:

- Interaction with policymakers
- Thinking about different scenarios in a sort of Robin Hood way
- Designing and carrying out projects that encourage the participation of various community development actors

## **7. Some Basic Conditions for Effective Learning and Training for Community Development**

Overall, participants emphasized that for the process of learning and training to be effective it must:

- Be participatory
- Recognize the thin line between what is legal and what is legitimate for community development work.
- Be sustainable

## **8. Some Issues for Future Relays**

We hope that future relays can build on the work of this first relay meeting in thinking on learning and training for Community Development. The ideas explored here can be added onto and deepened. For example, it is worth asking: to what extent do these ideas fit or don’t fit with the reality in different European countries. How can we organise ourselves to work with the ideas explored above? Equally important, how best can we work with policymakers, economic actors etc.?

### List of Participants

	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Name</b>
1.	Samenlevingsopbouw Vlaanderen (Flanders/Belgium)	Lies Beunens
2.	(Fundacio Desenvolupament Comunitari (Cataluña/ Spain)	Gianni Orsini
3.	Inter-Réseaux Développement Social Urbain (IRDSU), France	Carole Dane

Information on EU Funding:

<http://ec.europa.eu/grants>