



COVER SHEET

Brown, Kerry and Gyde, Sharon and Renwick, Adele and Walsh, Karyn (2003)
Government-Community Partnerships: Rhetoric or Reality?. *Contemporary Issues in Business and Government* 9(1):pp. 56-62.

Copyright 2003 Curtin University of Technology

Accessed from: https://eprints.qut.edu.au/secure/00004812/01/Government-community_partnerships.doc

Government-Community Partnerships: Rhetoric or Reality?

By

Kerry Brown,
Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane, Australia.

Sharon Gyde
Young Mothers for Young Women,
Brisbane, Australia

Adele Renwick
Young Mothers for Young Women,
Brisbane, Australia

and

Karyn Walsh
Micah Projects
Brisbane, Australia.

Contact:

Dr Kerry Brown
School of Management
Queensland University of Technology
GPO Box 2434
Brisbane Qld 4001
Ph: 61-7-3864 2939
Fax: 61-7-3864 1313
Email: ka.brown@qut.edu.au

Government-Community Partnerships: Rhetoric or Reality?

Abstract

This paper will explore a community development project involving a peer support and advocacy network, Young Mothers for Young Women, to determine the challenges and barriers in the management of government-community sector partnerships. Young Mothers for Young Women has identified models of practice and policies that can make a difference to how services and young women engage with society. However, passing this information through the chain of relationships both within the community and government sector has proven to be problematic. The impact of competitive tendering, the complexity of the way in which government-community sector relationships are constructed, the practices of government in terms of policy making processes, and the issues surrounding the ownership of intellectual property will be examined. This paper will share some of the experiences, the learnings and possible ways of improving relationships so as to achieve better community and individual outcomes through informed policy and practice in the government and community sectors for people seeking assistance. Government-community partnerships offer an opportunity for community development and shifting power relations between government and community groups to a power-sharing partnership. However, if these relations are managed poorly or fail to promote development and empowerment, they may further entrench existing inequalities.

Introduction

Contemporary governments are increasingly unable to resolve the ‘wicked issues’ (Clarke and Stewart, 1997) of complex and intractable social concerns such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, drug use and social isolation. In recognition of the inability to find easy solutions to these ‘wicked issues’, new and different organizational forms are being experimented with. These new forms are argued to avoid the problems of existing structures such as markets and hierarchies by adopting cross-cutting, networked, partnership arrangements that have the potential to add value and enhance performance (Jackson and Stainsby, 2000). In this way, public-private partnerships establish an organizational form that has the flexibility to transcend traditional organizational boundaries and avoid the rigidities of bureaucracy.

A community development model is argued to improve the capacity of communities to engage in problem solving and, importantly, provide opportunities for innovation and resolving intractable social issues. This paper examines the implications and outcomes of adopting public-private partnership organizational arrangements in relation to managing a community development project. The first part of the paper outlines the research issue, describes and justifies the methodology employed and reviews the literature relating to government-community sector partnerships. The second part examines the use of government-community partnerships for community capacity building and consequent empowerment of those individuals and groups involved in sponsored projects. It utilizes Laverack’s (2001) nine organizational domains of empowerment as a framework to investigate the ways in which the management and organizational aspects of government-community partnerships may

promote or hinder community development and capacity building. The final section of the paper addresses the questions raised by Lavarack (2001, p.142) to determine whether empowerment and capacity building hinges crucially on one or more domains and in so doing tests whether 'some domains are more important than others for empowerment and whether there is an interdependence of the domains' that is played out in community-government partnerships.

A case study of a community organization, adopting a community development model, is undertaken to elaborate on the issues surrounding managing and resolving community issues through government-community partnerships. A government agency commissioned and sponsored a project by a community organization applying a partnering approach. The case highlights the innovative nature and new possibilities presented by government-community partnerships but cautions against some of the unintended or adverse consequences of working with government actors in community development initiatives. Government-community partnerships may offer an opportunity for shifting power relations between government and community groups to a power-sharing partnership however partnerships may revert to a more adversarial relationship inherent in contractual market-based agreements.

Methodology

This research examines the management and control issues surrounding the implementation of an innovative community development initiative within a government-community sector partnership approach. Maxwell (1996) suggests that, in order to establish previously unidentified consequences of specific interventions, there is a need to establish causal links between such interventions and what is being

observed. A case study methodology was chosen as case studies are argued to be valuable mechanisms to identify and establish causal links between the phenomenon under investigation and the context in which it arises (Yin, 1993). The particular strength of the case study as a method of research inquiry lies in the ability to make causal connections between phenomena when events cannot be controlled for (Yin, 1993). Case study analysis provides a useful and rich method from which to draw conclusions about the research problem.

Black and Champion (1976, p.91) argue that case studies have enormous flexibility with regard to data collection and the dimensions of analysis available. It was identified that the personal experiences of participants, their interpretation of these experiences and the context in which they occurred were of significance to this research. Furthermore, as qualitative research such as a case study is alert to the incidents and events being examined, incorporates a holistic mode of inquiry and focuses on lived meanings, the reliability and integrity of the findings is enhanced in relation to both participants and other group members (Maxwell 1996).

Ethnographic interviews were used to collect data from participants in the project (Spradley, 1979). Given their role as instigators, and in some cases both instigators and recipients of change, it was considered important to gain the perspective of the peer workers of Young Mothers for Young Women in relation to what changes they were seeking to implement, as well as their perceptions of what the project accomplished. The ethnographic approach elicits critical information about the relationships and incidents of the case study, and provides a valid and useful

understanding of the contextual issues and facilitates the research through participation and observation (Lee, 1999).

The lived experiences of those involved in the project were captured and documented through group work, working together to build a profile of the case and co-production of the research write-up. The methods employed seek to explore the partnership between government, community organizations and community members from a community of interest – young women who are parents. In this way, processes, events and issues were interrogated and analysed to determine the barriers and enabling factors critical to productive and successful government-community sector partnerships. These research methods were designed to elicit attitudes towards, and understanding of, community development initiatives and the implications for government-community sector partnership outcomes, processes and policy.

Government-Community sector partnerships

Decision makers in government are experimenting with new arrangements and different types of relationships to achieve better social and economic outcomes for communities. Public-private partnerships offer new ways of undertaking social action to resolve problems through collaborating across sectors. Partnerships between the public sector and the community sector offer the prospect of bringing together the full array of stakeholders and providing integrated and holistic responses to issues.

Cooperation is necessary as it brings together the stakeholders to jointly achieve goals traditionally, it has been argued that cooperation relates to a focus on working together to achieve outcomes for oneself rather than gains for another party, that is,

coordinating action and behaviour with other parties to achieve one's own goals (Chisholm, 1989).

Government-community sector partnerships are a sub-set of public-private partnerships. The traditional cash transfers from government to the citizens requiring assistance have been replaced increasingly by third party contractual arrangements with both the for-profit and non-profit sectors to deliver services on behalf of governments (Rom, 1999). Connor, et al. (1998) suggest that challenges in developing collaborative efforts through public-private partnerships include:

Building trust, navigating turf issues, developing a shared vision, creating a sense of inclusiveness, resolving conflicts, sustaining the effort beyond an immediate crisis and supporting implementation at all levels of the collaborating organizations (p.128).

The ability to build and sustain partnerships crucially hinges on the parties' ongoing interactions being premised on long-term support and negotiation of power sharing arrangements and relationships (Brown and Ryan, 2002).

Young (2000, p.150) argues that relations between government and community organizations can be described as supplementary, complementary or adversarial. In the supplementary approach, Young (2000) suggests community groups are left to provide services to citizens in the gaps created by unsatisfied demand of those citizens in government service delivery. The complementary model demonstrates that community groups are viewed as partners in provision of services. This model

suggests that community groups work together with government to provide services although they are financed by government. In the adversarial view, it is contended (Young, 2000) the role of the community sector is to actively lobby government to take specific action in relation to service provision and policy development. The role of government in this approach is to influence and regulate the activities of non-profit organizations.

The effect of adopting these different models is to shape the relations and policy direction regarding the community sector in particular ways. Adverse effects were argued to have occurred in cases in which the government assumed that community agencies could simply substitute for government providing services and led to 'miscalculations of the ability of charities to compensate for cutbacks in government service provision' (Young, 2000). It is argued that while public-private partnerships may offer the possibility of establishing a complementary relationship model between government and the community sector, there may be factors in relationship building and the negotiation of relations that work against this outcome. The consequences of poorly managed or mismatched expectations about the partnership relations may result in adversarial or supplementary approaches being enacted.

Lovrich (1999) suggests that partnering arrangements between community groups and government can increase social capital and enhance communities. However, in areas where there is a need to build up social capital as a part of community development, a long-term commitment is necessary to achieve successful outcomes from government-community sector partnerships. Community capacity building is a significant element of improving social outcomes for communities. Community

empowerment is argued to be crucial to community development initiatives (Laverack, 2001). However, Rom (1999) observes that partnership initiatives often incorporate the rhetoric of empowerment of citizens, but in effect may simply transfer responsibilities from the state to the community. In this way, partnerships may be used as the vehicle for service delivery and achieving better social outcomes but community groups may be coerced to take on added tasks under the guise of empowerment.

This paper posits that successful government-community partnerships require a high degree of cooperation that tends towards interdependency rather than simply engaging in joint action. However, the degree to which diverse actors working together can achieve such cooperation and mutually supportive behaviour needs to be explored. The concern that then arises is whether it is possible for a public-private partnership between a community group based on network principles connecting with a bureaucratic organization to successfully move to a power sharing and empowerment approach. There is a need also to acknowledge the exigencies that should be considered in altering existing hierarchical power relations. This avenue of investigation leads to the issue; where community development is used as a tool and new arrangements are introduced, what effect does this have on the relationship between the parties in a public-private partnership? This research suggests that, while partnership arrangements offer flexibility and the prospect of achieving joint gains in solving social problems, there may be a tendency within public organizations to seek to maintain a management locus of control.

Background to the case study

Young Mothers for Young Women is a community initiative established following a participatory research project exploring the links between violence and gender in the lives of young mothers. Young women identified that, when they were seeking to leave a violent or abusive relationship, it was to their friends or other young women who may have only been acquaintances that they would turn to for assistance. As young women with children, they constantly stated that they did not trust government services for fear of losing their children and being judged as a “bad parent”.

The goal of the network has been to provide formal training to young women who are interested in being peer workers so that through informal as well as formal networks accurate information and resources can be disseminated. An additional goal of the network has been to educate and inform policy makers and service providers of the reality of young women’s lives and the constant fear of judgment that accompanies young women who are parents and seeking services. Young Mothers for Young Women has identified models of practice and policies that might make a difference to how social services and young women engage. However, passing this information through the chain of relationships both within the community and government sector has proved to be fraught with difficulties. The impact of competitive tendering, the complexity of community sector relationships, and the practices of government with respect to policy-making processes and the ownership of intellectual property will be explored. This paper will share some of the experiences, the learnings and possible ways of improving relationships so as to achieve better outcomes for people seeking

assistance through well-informed policy and practice in the government and community sector.

Changing power relations - Cooperation?

There has been recognition that implementing new organizational forms require a new set of managerial and operational strategies and imperatives. These new organizational and managerial frameworks and relations may realign existing power relations. One of the intentions of this study is to establish the degree to which developmental aspects are valued and understand the priority government accords community development when other 'output' measures are at stake.

The application for government funds to assist in the empowerment of young women to contribute to decision making about policy, program design implementation and funding is very complex. The relationships required are multiple and multifaceted:

- Within the community of interest. These relationships are formal and informal and have been developing over a nine-year period. Young Women have been trained and supported in providing leadership and networking with others in the community who share the similar social, personal and economic concerns.
- Within the organization fostering the involvement of young women. In contributing to seeking solutions, multiple factors that impact on their quality of life, and their opportunities in the community need to be addressed.

- Within the broader community sector. Those agencies responsible for the provision of services to young women who are parents, and the professional community are included in this sector.
- Within government. This area includes several tiers of government including Commonwealth Government, a unit within Government and a program within a unit. This long chain of implementation is then extended to State Government through a department and then a unit within that department. This department then has carriage of co-ordination across departments.

It is argued that often community development practice is more evident in local or place based initiatives (Hess and Adams, 2001). The application of community development principles and the relevance to developing organizational responses and professional programs for a community of interest such as young women who are parents is less visible or respected. In order to gain a place in a continuum of community development and community empowerment processes effective partnerships need to be developed. Young (2000) contends that the complementary model indicates that governments use partnership arrangements to overcome information deficiency problems and allow those community groups delivering services to provide services specific to the needs of local communities.

A commitment by government to listen to and value what is often referred to as consumer participation or consumer accountability, is critical. Connor et al (1998) contend that trust, generating a shared vision and ensuring a sense of inclusiveness are some of the greatest challenges in embarking on a collaborative approach to

partnerships. Young women who are parents have highlighted their social isolation, their distrust of professionals, and the complexity of their personal, social, and economic circumstances. The group, through dialogue with over 300 young women over a nine-year period, has built up a body of knowledge, which provides insight into how resources could be allocated to this population of people to achieve better social, personal and economic outcomes with them.

The process has created pathways for 17 young women in roles of leadership, which has incorporated a return to work or part time study. Maintaining a resource base for individual and personal access to opportunities and choices, as well as creating a pathway to move beyond the personal and influence public policy remains a constant challenge. In a highly competitive environment, the valuing and prioritising of participation of people who are directly affected by adversity, poverty and social exclusion is critical if the allocation of financial resources by government is going to make a difference in the lives of people and not simply create a bigger industry of people who become the experts about others lives.

This reflection has been organized around the nine “operational domains” of community empowerment participation identified by Glen Laverack (2001) in his article, “ An identification and interpretation of the organizational aspects of community empowerment”. The areas of participation, leadership, asking ‘why’ and problem assessment are cited as significant operational domains. Structural aspects of resources, organizational structures and resource mobilization are also included. External aspects of linking with other people and organizations, and the role of outside agents are also found to be important domains. Program management is

identified as the final domain. These domains have been interrogated to determine the ways in which empowerment was enhanced or hindered in the case study of the government-community sector partnership. The relative importance of each domain in achieving empowerment was also evaluated to determine whether an interplay of the different domains might have contributed to empowerment or whether one or more of the domains crucially affected empowerment.

Participation

In terms of determining the way group involvement may create the conditions for empowerment, Laverack (2001) utilizes Arnstein's (1996) ladders of participation as a structure for examining community members' participation. This domain is particularly important as it differentiates between different levels of participation. In this way, a distinction is drawn between simply being included and, participatory activities that lead to empowerment through actually engaging in joint action in a meaningful way. The project gave young women the opportunity to participate in a range of activities and forums that brought different stakeholders together across different organizations, professions and interest groups. The resources allocated through funding enabled participation of a broader group of young women to participate and contribute their views.

However, one of problems encountered was that young women felt that their participation was reframed as an outcome for government rather than being premised on a partnership. In this way, it was perceived that their participation was more important than their content or contribution. Young women agreed to participate because their agenda was to contribute to social and political change and not simply

be reduced to being present at a particular event. Moreover, participation by government was expected after project finished with little or no negotiation about the parameters of this involvement or the amount of additional remuneration to cover further costs.

Laverack (2001) argues that 'participatory' and 'empowerment' approaches are different and these differences reside in the specific agenda and purpose of processes in each of the approaches. Empowerment has an explicit purpose 'to bring about social and political change' while participation does not necessarily challenge existing social relations (Laverack, 2001). Participation in the project was not just about undergoing the training but providing a conduit to better social and individual outcomes. The project itself modelled a pathway for young women to obtain employment and training in undertaking the project. However this outcome was not valued or of much interest to government and was considered a sideline issue.

The opportunity for leadership within the organization and within the community sector was empowering. The experience of being disempowered or disrespected was by professionals who saw themselves as competitors to service provision aspects of the project or individual people in the bureaucracy who reframed issues to suit the outcomes for the department rather than listen or respect the experience which was being communicated from participants.

Training and employment were the keys to the empowerment of the young women. When the project ceased and the contracts ended the experience for the women was

different, with those who did not have other opportunities to progress onto feeling disrespected and devalued.

The basis of the young women's contribution was that their agenda focused on social change. There was an advocacy and social change approach for human services to consider the input and value for inclusion of young women in relation to social policy formulation and decision-making. Many young women themselves can play a crucial role in developing a responsive and appropriate community service to other young women who are parents. Young women have demonstrated that in partnership with professionals many of the barriers that exist and prevent young families accessing services can be broken down and effective partnerships can be created.

Leadership

The structure of leadership was, by invitation, a pathway to building upon previous experience. A process of being explicit about the expectations and commitment required for being involved in the project was undertaken. Young women who had previously been leaders in the network were invited to become peer researchers and new young women were invited to play a leadership role in the network. Emphasis was also placed on offering opportunities to develop a range of leadership options with people selecting opportunities compatible with their skills.

The organization has a strong commitment to developing the leadership potential within the communities of interest within which the organization works. Peer leaderships and professional support are considered a partnership necessary to enable the project to move forward. Young women reported that the project enabled them to

have a profile both internally and externally to the organization. However, their leadership was diminished when there was direct competition by government or other providers about being the leaders of the initiative. Government, wanting to gain recognition for the work of the community when providing funding to the community, created a barrier to the empowerment of the participants.

Organizational Structures

There are both internal and external aspects in relation to the organizational structures that may promote empowerment. A Project Management approach assisted in organizing the human and physical resources to develop and carry out the project. Financial management, organization of training, oversight of issues as they arose, regular meetings with peer researchers and some involvement with the funding body were processes that assisted in achieving successful outcomes for the project.

Applying strategic human resource management principles was a significant factor in successfully achieving the outcomes of the project. Three young women were employed for 10 hours a week to implement the project. Two peer leaders received training and support to undertake activities. For the first 6 months approximately 20 young women participated and in the following six-month period a structured group explored the issues of healthy relationships, training, education and employment opportunities and related social support issues. In addition 75 young women were interviewed about their issues and concerns and possible solutions to those issues.

External to organization, various state and federal government agencies were involved in the project. Commonwealth and State Departments, both with identified outcomes

for funding, participated in the project. A unit within both levels of government was also involved. Staff from the units had operational responsibility for the funding relationships

An inter-departmental reference group at a State level provided communication within government about the project and was used to explore the options for policy and program related issues, arising from the project. This group was not very well attended. There was a lack of a core group of participants, and communication tended to be defensive rather than a partnership. This dynamic produced dialogue that would impact on any social and political change on how young women, and their families were placed in the community.

A community based reference group with representatives from across the sector was also formed. This group provided a lot of discussion and demonstrated the breadth of issues, whilst providing direct contacts for participants from a range of local communities. The group did not provide direction about how to do the research, but provided ideas and connections for the service- providers' forums. Four forums were held with 65 community service professionals attending and providing reflections and input from their perspectives.

A Rural and Remote project dealing with the similar issues was funded at the same time as the Young Mothers for Young Women. The relationship between the two projects at a community organizational level was strong, but there was little recognition given for the support, direction and mentoring which occurred between the two project teams. The liaison between the teams was a departmental

responsibility and was therefore was not a part of the activities, which was reflected upon for future purposes. The data from across the geographic communities provided similar information about the experiences of young families.

There was a marked difference between the responses and contribution to the project of the government reference group and the community reference group. Having ownership and a personal stake in the issues, and outcomes for local areas appeared to motivate the community reference group to engage with the project much more seriously. It appeared that, for the inter-departmental group, interaction with stakeholders in regard to the project was just 'part of their job' rather than being highly motivated to achieve change. The connections made through the research provided linkages and some of these have continued which has enabled a second project to attract funding to build upon the learnings and identified issues from this project.

Problem assessment

Lavarack (2001) suggests that problem assessment is one of most empowering domains when the community undertakes the processes of identification, action and resolution as an integrated package of decision and action. Young women who were researchers learnt new skills for identifying issues and solutions. They also learnt new ways of documenting so that their issues and solutions could be tabled in the public arena through a carefully researched report. Young women developed the skills to design and interview for the purposes of identification of the problems and actions to resolve them. The skills to analyse the data were acquired through skills development in computer technology. Training in using a software package to analyse qualitative

research data was provided, and young women communicated the learnings from this training to other young women.

A further project was undertaken to develop a small booklet outlining the issues and recommendations from learnings that came from past personal and work experiences in the area of young families at risk. This booklet was distributed to politicians, key people in Government and other community organizations. The aim was to continue to put on the agenda the concerns and policy recommendations for young women and their families. A key outcome of the project was the ability to learn skills in the areas of political advocacy, understanding that timing was important to consolidate gains from the project, using the research report as leverage for gaining political visibility of the issues with politicians and policy makers and to raise the profile of those involved in the project and the target group.

Young women learnt to deal with the problems associated with the large number of stakeholders and competing interests but this was sometimes at the personal cost of experiencing a lack of respect for the positions of these stakeholders. In order to be effective, there needs to be a commitment from those with power to accept and receive the input from those who are less powerful. More work could be done on ensuring that consumer participation and input is valued by policy makers and in the assessment of tenders or funding allocations.

This project also gave young women a new perspective on the issues for young women who are responsible for families. It is common to look at the percentage of teenage parents, as a portion of the total birth rate, to identify problems. However, it

disguises the problem because the issue is not the total number of young women who are having children who are under 25 but the combination of poverty, social isolation and family life which many young women are experiencing. The answer lies in economic pathways as well as social support. This factor is not widely addressed in policymaking. The research undertaken as part of the project highlighted this policy gap. The presence of domestic violence for young women was identified as a significant barrier to women seeking out options and access to resources and opportunities in the community.

Resource Mobilization

Internal

It is contended that an organization has to be prepared to allocate enough resources to ensure that participation can occur. The decision makers have to be prepared to listen to what young women say about how they want to participate and how resources should be used to make a difference. It was the choice of those involved in the organization to allocate resources by job sharing between the project manager and the peer advocates. There was no additional money allocated for this purpose. The alternative would have been to engage a project worker who would have implemented the project and analysed the data collected through the participation of young women. The organization was committed to continue providing opportunities for young women to learn and facilitate their input into government decision-making and policy formulation processes.

External

The work of the young women and their network has contributed to raising the profile and the need for governments to target responses to young parents. However, to date it has been limited by who and how the resources are used, once they are allocated to a community organization to ensure the participation of young women and their families in the design and delivery of the programs in local communities.

Young women have identified some very important and specific practice issues that impact on the overall outcomes for young families in accessing services. These factors still need to be heard and applied appropriately in the mobilization of resources to young families. Often, it is at this point that young advocate women feel that their experiences are reframed to suit the particular policy or professional lens of people in charge of resources.

Asking why

Young women constantly do 'ask why' but having the skills and maturity required not to take the responses personally was a challenge. Young women in asking questions of professionals have been labelled as either "too needy to be able to really offer something", "not representative enough because it is only their own view", "too politicised because they have a view about complex moral issues which impact on the lives of young women" and "not objective" (a trait which is assumed of any one with professional status).

However, even with the personal cost to the young women, they have believed it was worthwhile to question. They felt it was better to have a go than not to have the opportunity to participate.

Links with other people and organizations

The links with other organizations and partnerships have been identified in the sections on organization structure. However, the nature of partnerships and collaborative work is changing rapidly in the current funding environment. Partnerships can mean that information shared and developed is then used for competitive tendering. To what extent organizations share a commitment to consumer participation is also either a strength or a barrier. The emphasis on partnerships can often gloss over some fundamental differences that may not be able to be resolved especially in the areas of lifestyle and moral issues.

One of the barriers for the young women has been the level of resources required to maintain partnerships or even enter into them. Whilst the value and importance of partnerships is recognized by young women it has been their experience that the ability or inability to develop such alliances based on the resource base across the community sector has not been given enough attention. For example, an excellent initiative may come from a small group of people, that deserves funding, and may have an opportunity to demonstrate outcomes but may not have the capacity to develop partnerships without additional resources to mount the bid for funding. Such an initiative should not be judged on partnerships prior to funding but on the ability to develop partnerships once funding is received. The tension around the desire for

innovative responses and partnerships can create barriers to the inclusion of minority groups and small non-profit organizations in the future delivery of services.

The role of external agents

External agents are critical to enabling young women who are parents participate and provide leadership in the community. However, the appropriate role of the agents requires discussion and reflection. Government has shifted away from the distribution of resources to enable community to address community issues to the distribution of resources to include and self-promote what government does.

During this project and after, the young women have felt that as outcomes became more visible, they became more invisible. The tension around intellectual property in relation to both control and ownership of issues presents many barriers to empowerment and community development. The idea of seeking funding to empower members of the community who do not have access to resources is diminishing and being replaced by only seeking funding to provide the services that government has identified and chooses to fund. This is a major barrier to innovation yet a criterion for funding is to be innovative.

The competing interests and ability of government and community to seek outcomes from projects and competing for the same pool of funds can prevent the application of community development and community empowerment processes. The rhetoric is not reflective in the practice or in the outcomes. Issues become reframed to suit the silos of money and the competing demands as well as the competition for money. Money can be the incentive rather than a well-based framework for practice and

engagement with a particular community to put in tenders. New money attracts new players and this is rarely a consideration in the selection process.

Even when money has been tailored to community development initiatives it usually is the crumbs of the funding round and not the core component. For young women who are parents who have been trying to advocate, they have often had to accept rejection for funding because as young mothers their initiative was seen as service provision and not community development. When they apply under service provision initiatives, it is seen as community development and not the provision of the kind of services identified.

The findings indicate that external agents can make or break the process of supporting community development initiatives. An organization can be seen as an outside agent from the community of interest. Sound models of partnership are necessary if outcomes are to be achieved. The barrier is often who determines partnerships and how many are needed for any one initiative to have the opportunity to succeed.

Project management

The funding body not being prescriptive about how the money was spent, particularly in relation to wages and employment classifications, assisted this project. Therefore, the funder enabled the organization to be flexible in the allocation of money to fund activities and personnel required for successful completion of the project. However, there were tensions about the chosen pathways for achieving outcomes.

From the point of view of the community-based organization, the organization had a commitment to sharing the resources through job sharing the different roles and responsibilities, which were needed for the project. This approach was encapsulated in a commitment to employment of young women rather than a voluntary participation framework. Funds were also allocated to bring in trainers when required and contract consultants when a specific task was needed and either time or skill restraints prevented project team from undertaking the activity. The project was founded on a partnership model respecting the different skills that members each brought to the project, which included life experience. An organizational context that enabled mentoring and support from others who were not directly employed to provide coaching and assistance was an important aspect of empowerment. However, there was a need to accept the limitations of the chosen strategies and not create unrealistic expectations on people.

Ownership and intellectual property issues were one of the more difficult areas affecting the partnership arrangements between government and the community sector. Tensions were created around the parameters of the project and the ownership of the ideas on the part of government. This aspect was difficult for young women in all the different roles that they had. An art work project which was part of the overall project and was partially funded by the project was seen as the property of the funder and not the women who worked with the artist in developing a piece of artwork reflecting the many roles which women play in the community and in life. There was also a lack of consultation about the distribution of material.

The final report of the project was developed by combining the project report entitled “Opportunities, Choices, and Pathways for Young Women Who Are Parents” written by the young women with the report of the rural and remote project. The ensuing final report contained only an acknowledgement that the report was based on previous work, rather than being co-authored by the young women. As a result of this action, the young women felt a loss of control and power as the project ended.

The young women reported that being employed gave them increased ownership and commitment to the project. They felt the responsibility for ensuring that tasks were done and if they were not there was no one else to do it. Being in paid employment gave them new insights into the balance between family life and work and was a stepping-stone away from welfare dependency. The personal outcomes were access to training, a sense of value and control, new conflict resolution skills around negotiating how issues were identified and in some cases reframed, and engaging in high-level decision-making and policy advocacy.

Continued reflection is required on the nature of partnerships and the purposes of the partnerships. It is becoming increasingly difficult in a competitive environment to pay attention to the principles and processes of community development.

The barriers are

- The power differential in relationship between stakeholders
- The short time frames for developing community capacity

- The lack of commitment to respecting that the processes are as important in communities of interest and service provision as they are in geographic or place initiatives,
- Little or no explicit value placed on consumer participation and input or accountability to consumers

Findings from the case study demonstrate that community development and successful social outcomes hinge on the interplay between all the identified domains. The research findings also indicate however, that one of the domains crucial to achieving community empowerment was a project management approach. In terms of individual empowerment, young women were empowered through providing leadership, training and skills development opportunities. The project was innovative in its project management approach and utilization of human resources. The partnership approach allowed flexibility to develop a groundbreaking and different model of service delivery. It also added a strategic element in terms of developing skills of young women in high-level decision-making and policy formulation in relation to young women with families.

Conclusion

The rhetoric of community engagement and partnerships does not adequately reflect the reality of the web of complex relationships that are required for the distribution of financial resources to the community to address personal, social and economic issues for individuals, families and communities. The role of service providers who can broker and facilitate these processes is being diminished and the invisibility of groups

of people in the community who do not have resources to participate is continuing. In this way, social exclusion is being maintained.

Larger organizations that can deliver across a wide geographic area seem to be favoured by governments (Ryan and Brown, 1998). As a consequence, smaller diverse organizations are struggling to survive; however, larger organizations do not necessarily incorporate the diversity required to capture people who are excluded. Recognition of the autonomy of community organizations and the innovation of people solving their own problems and addressing the issues which they are being confronted with is being lost in the name of “accountability”, “outcomes” and increased layers of both community sector and government bureaucracy.

In order to replace rhetoric with reality there needs to be a greater visibility and commitment to respecting the roles, knowledge and experience that individuals and groups have as community members, in our case study young women who are parents, a community managed non-profit organization and state or commonwealth government. Creating and maintaining trickle down effect of control and ownership and a charity approach to complex social issues will not create change in the long term.

References

- Arnstein, S. (1996) A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, July, 216-233.
- Black, J. and Champion, D. (1976) *Methods and issues in social research*. John Wiley, New York.
- Brown, K. and Ryan, N. (2002) Industry Planning in the Community Services Sector: A Case Study of Australia. *Public Administration and Policy*, 11(1), 23-39.
- Chisholm, D. (1989) *Coordination without hierarchy: Informal structures in multiorganizational systems*. University of California Press, Berkley.
- Clarke, M. and Stewart, J. (1997) Handling the wicked issues: A challenge for government. *Discussion Paper, Institute of Local Government Studies*, University of Birmingham.
- Connor, J., Kadel-Taras, S. and Vinokur-Kaplan, D. (1998) The Role of Nonprofit management and Support Organizations in Sustaining Community Collaborations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 10(2), 127-136.
- Hess, M. and Adams, D. (2001) Community in Public Policy: Fad or Foundation. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 60(2), 13-23.
- Jackson, P. and Stainsby, L. (2000) Managing Public Sector Networked Organisations. *Public Money and Management*, January-March, 11-16.
- Laverack, G. (2001) An identification and interpretation of the organizational aspects of community empowerment. *Community Development Journal*, 36(2), 134-145.
- Lee, T. (1999) *Using Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, Ca.
- Lovrich, N. (1999) Policy Partnering between the Public and the Not-for-profit Private Sectors. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(1), 177-191.

- Maxwell, J.A. (1996) *Qualitative Research Design*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, Ca.
- Rom, M. (1999) From Welfare State to Opportunity, Inc: Public-Private Partnerships in Welfare Reform. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(1), 155-176.
- Ryan, N. and Brown, K. (1998) Measuring the Performance of Community Organisations in Queensland and New Zealand. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 57(3), 41-51.
- Spradley, J. (1979) *The Ethnographic Interview*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Fort Worth Texas.
- Yin, R.K. (1993) *Applications of Case Study Research*. Sage Publications, Newbury Park, Ca.
- Yin, R.K. (1989) *Case study research. Design and methods*. Sage Publications, Newbury Park, Ca.
- Young, D. (2000) Alternative Models of Government-Nonprofit Sector Relations: theoretical and International Perspectives. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 29(1), 149-172.