

CF 09

Ymchwiliad i dlodi yng Nghymru: Cymunedau yn Gyntaf – yr hyn a ddysgwyd
Inquiry into poverty in Wales: Communities First – lessons learnt

Ymateb gan: Oxfam

Response from: Oxfam

Strand 1: Communities First – Lessons Learnt

1. Oxfam works with partners to overcome poverty in three ways:
 - I. By developing projects and programmes with people experiencing and living in poverty that improve their lives and show others how things can change
 - II. By raising public awareness of poverty to advocate and create pressure for change
 - III. By working with policymakers to tackle the causes of poverty.
For further information about Oxfam’s work, please see www.oxfam.org.uk
2. Oxfam Cymru welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee’s inquiry. Over the last decade we have accrued a vast amount of experience of working with partners to help people raise themselves out of poverty and build sustainable livelihoods. We work at a grassroots level, pan-Wales and actively campaign at a national level for real and lasting change.
3. Our projects work directly with people experiencing poverty – with most of the evidence provided here reflecting some of their voices and concerns, by what we have been told by our local partners.
4. Oxfam Cymru would like to see people who are experiencing and living in poverty provided with the opportunity to design and support the delivery of the services that matter to them. People understand the outcomes that they, and their communities, require and their active engagement in service delivery will lead to more effective outcomes.
5. We would be happy to coordinate oral evidence sessions for the Committee with the representatives from our partnerships who were participants in Oxfam Cymru’s Building Livelihoods & Strengthening Communities in Wales project (the Livelihoods project)¹ some of whom - submitted to this response.

¹ African Community Centre, Swansea; Caia Park Partnership, Wrexham; Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council & Foryd Centre, Rhyl; DOVE Workshop, Neath; Duffryn Community Link, Newport; Glyncoch Community Regeneration, Pontypridd; South Riverside Community Development Centre, Cardiff; Sylfaen Cymunedol Cyfyngedig, Caernarfon; The Wallich Clifford Community, Ebbw Vale.

Question 1: What worked and didn't work about the Communities First programme?

What worked:

6. All of our partners' responses agreed that the community engagement and community development focus was a great aspect of the Communities First (CF) programme at the outset. The building of social capital and social infrastructure, along with investment of substantial resources into the community, enabled the development of local projects for local people and their communities.
7. We heard from our partners that the financial investment enabled the opportunity to build upon and strengthen existing activity that was already taking place. The programme provided an effective opportunity for meaningful partnership working and collaboration, providing holistic support and access to services with a central point of contact for communities.
8. Good practice and new ways of working were shared across the CF clusters, one of which was the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA)², an assets-based method developed in the UK by Oxfam, which was successfully used in a number of CF areas to support community members in delivery. It is a participatory approach based on the recognition that all people have abilities and assets that can be developed to help them improve their lives. Cross Cluster working and peer-learning was an important part of the programme.
9. Mutual trust grew between the service providers and the participants and two-way relationships developed from the programme being based in local communities.

What didn't work?

10. The majority of our partner respondents observed that towards the latter stages of the programme, the agenda was increasingly driven by Welsh Government priorities and processes at the expense of communities' concerns. The perception is that the focus changed to becoming fixated on outputs rather than outcomes, which failed to properly reach or address the needs of CF constituents experiencing poverty.
11. Long-term, this didn't augur well for the programme's attempts to provide preventative poverty projects that were sustainable for communities. It was suggested to us that a programme designed to focus on outputs is not a sustainable method suited to addressing long term poverty in Wales.
12. One respondent noted that from the outset Communities First used a postcode analysis and the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) as key indicators.

²<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-sustainable-livelihoods-approach-toolkit-for-wales-297233>

However, as the data was averaged out, there was a view that the analysis it provided was in parts flawed.

13. What data is used is always a critical factor, though generally WIMD is a *fairly* accurate mechanism.
14. Other respondents drew attention to the issue that once the programme was top sliced (taking part of the budget and allocating it to finance other projects or services etc.) different projects were parachuted in - in isolation - creating unnecessary competition in the community. There were changes made in some of the local authorities who became delivery agents and took more of a role in placing additional projects in the community. It is felt that some of the local authorities were not working in partnership and cooperation with existing organisations which sometimes resulted in duplication of effort.
15. One significant concern was the (perceived) onerous monitoring and reporting requirements, which while understandable as a safeguard to protect public funds and provide a data set of evidence, were deemed excessive and placed huge additional burdens on community organisations delivering Communities First projects. Successor programmes need to find a way to deliver effective monitoring and evaluation without placing a significant burden on smaller delivery organisations.

Question 2: How local authorities will decide which projects continue to receive funding after June 2017

16. Our respondent partners believe that there is considerable ambiguity about the direction of which local authorities are making decisions. Some are still in planning and consultation stage with other cluster leads who deliver the individual activity, working collectively into the transformative process which will then feed into the Local Authority.
17. For other respondents it is difficult to plan, as the respective local authority is still in consultation in regard to the legacy funding and is going forward into the initial wellbeing assessment that feeds into public service boards (PSBs).
18. A number of partners expressed concern that local authorities will take work in-house and fail to engage with the third sector or other external delivery partners within their communities.
19. One Local Authority is implementing a 30% cut across all funding streams with some projects concluding March 2018, without personnel – who have been made redundant. Some buildings will remain in the community with others closing and future use of the buildings for the community is to be agreed.

20. In other clusters projects have already finished, employees made redundant and the building in the community has closed.
21. An alternative approach is being considered in another CF1st cluster where the Local Authority has asked their community partners, who are closer to the participants of the programme, which option would be appropriate to their projects. The two options were: 1. Straight reduction of 70% across the project or 2. 100% for a shorter period.
22. It is clear from our conversations that the process by which local authorities are moving forward is somewhat mixed and still an ongoing process and that Local Authorities are taking various approaches in making decisions. It may well be that different approaches, in different parts of Wales is the correct way forward.

Question 3: How different poverty reduction programmes (Communities for Work, LIFT, and Flying Start etc.) will change as a result of the end of Communities First

23. A number of programme partners told us that they consider Communities for Work will be less effective without the supporting Community First framework and infrastructure and its wider programming, and the programme risks being run in isolation from any other tackling poverty programme(s).
24. Other observations indicate that the schemes will struggle to deliver and pressure will increase to accept more people onto the Communities for Work programme. Other poverty schemes could be redundant as buildings close and service level agreements end.