

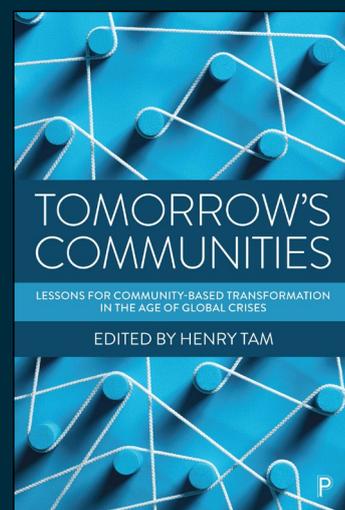
Winning with Communities: Briefing for policy makers on the importance of community-based transformation

OVERVIEW

Policy makers are increasingly concerned with how communities can become more collaborative and resilient in dealing with the problems they face. Successive crises from the global credit crunch to the coronavirus pandemic have piled on the pressure, especially in areas where people are not accustomed to or supported in pulling together to respond to social and economic challenges.

If communities are to take on a more influential role in the future, we need to be clear what works and what does not in practice. No one should be under any illusion that political mantra about leaving 'society' to take responsibility for its own wellbeing while cutting back the state is little more than a code for letting people slide into greater insecurity and suffering. By contrast, there is much that can be learnt from the numerous cases of effective community-based transformation, and the lessons should be applied strategically to key policy areas.

By drawing on expert findings about how to engender community improvements through, for example, community organising, cooperative enterprise, community finance, neighbourhood planning, community development, deliberative engagement, policy makers will be able to facilitate the achievement of better outcomes in partnership with communities. The evidence shows that, so long as the appropriate approaches are adopted, we can expect greater cost efficiency, enhanced public trust, and higher satisfaction with results that are sought and attained on the basis of informed collaboration.



Tomorrow's Communities, edited by Henry Tam, is published by Policy Press, Jul 2021.

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KEY FINDINGS

Summarised below are 12 key findings (each one of these is covered in a separate chapter in the book, *Tomorrow's Communities*) based on evidence from the UK, the US, and case examples from other parts of the world.

The transformation of socioeconomic relations in communities:

- [1] Substantial improvements to economic health and social cohesion can be achieved by establishing the legal and financial framework for community-based organisations to develop their assets, facilities and services to respond to local concerns.
- [2] Alternative mediums of exchange such as local currencies and time banking can promote an ethos of mutual support in otherwise fragmented communities, as well as increase the overall resources that are retained in the local economy.
- [3] Raising the understanding and influence communities have in relation to regeneration initiatives that affect them, can help build an informed consensus on what to prioritise and how to maximise the impact of the available resources.
- [4] The development of businesses that are owned and democratically controlled by local people who work in them can, with the help of platform technology, increase the quantity and quality of income-earning opportunities.

The transformation of collaborative behaviour with communities:

- [5] The distrust and misunderstanding that undermine partnership working between government bodies and community groups can be significantly reduced through the use of inclusive dialogue techniques and shared objective-setting.
- [6] Community learning, backed by trained facilitators, can help people explore the real causes of the problems they face, contribute to the formulation of viable solutions, and develop confidence in joint action.
- [7] Structural changes to engagement practices that empower communities to get involved as equal partners can increase participation levels, and reduce the likelihood of delays and costly mistakes damaging public projects.
- [8] Replacing rigid target-setting and inflexible monitoring by adaptive planning processes and responsive evaluation can help to avoid the wrong goals being pursued, and deliver outcomes that reflect changing needs and circumstances.

The transformation of policy outcomes by communities:

- [9] The co-production of public services can be strengthened by incentivising service providers through a form of preventive infrastructure to seek input from communities to improve both the public satisfaction with and financial viability of their services.
- [10] The adoption of the multi-stakeholder cooperative model can radically transform the health and social care sector to enable the people who provide care and those who need it to work out the optimal service provision.
- [11] Tackling food insecurity and related social problems by integrating community interests and contributions into planning and management arrangements can secure more effective outcomes and enhanced dignity for the communities concerned.
- [12] Environmental challenges can be better met when communities are actively involved in awareness raising, option evaluation and selection, and impact monitoring in matters such as neighbourhood designs, energy, transport and air quality.

One. Promote a shared vision for a common cause

Galvanise the public with a shared vision of how systematic community cooperation can bring about positive changes in terms of inclusion, sustainability and personal wellbeing. Draw attention to the distinctive features of community-based transformation and the diverse examples of success in raising community efficacy and standards of living.

Two. Put the public at the heart of public services

Ensure public services:

- facilitate the deliberative engagement of people in the areas concerned.
- share power in the selection of options.
- examine co-production possibilities.
- train staff to be responsive when discussing matters with members of the public.
- support a representative range of people to participate in the shaping and delivery of services.

Three. Invest in community development

Channel investment towards securing the supply of well-trained community development workers, with an ongoing remit to promote civil discourse, advise on local connective infrastructure for joint deliberations, and give support for articulating shared views and priorities to decision makers. Provide core community development funding to maintain communicative relations between state organisations and local communities, and across diverse sections of communities.

Four. Target support for community-based organisations

Enable community-based organisations with a sound base to maintain their vitality and grow. Focus on their sustainability rather than ad hoc initiatives, and provide what they need in terms of personnel training, additional investment, financial management advice and quality standards for community responsiveness, so that they can deliver long-term benefits for local people.

Five. Strengthen legal protection for community interests

Introduce clear and enforceable legal protection to ensure that community interests are served when financial support is given. This should cover:

- asset locks on all assets transferred.
- transparent and effective accountability arrangements.
- external audits for funds above a specified threshold.
- Guarantee against takeover by private interests.

Six. Adopt inclusive goal setting and responsive evaluation

Integrate the goals of inclusion, mutual respect, informed deliberation and shared improvement into funding criteria, and signal no group can embark on discriminatory action in the name of 'community' autonomy. In parallel, communities should be supported in revising specific objectives and action plans in the light of their experience of changing circumstances.

Seven. Facilitate reliable information sharing

Apply robust standards of veracity to information sharing that can impact on policies and practices that affect communities' wellbeing. Establish statutory independent mechanisms to provide adjudication of disputed claims and enforcement against deception. Support informed deliberations by strengthening library services, adult learning, public service broadcasting, and universal access to high quality broadband.

Eight. Distribute power and accountability in line with subsidiarity

Transfer decision-making powers for public decisions to the lowest possible level where they can be made effectively. At the same time, ensure that the designated decision makers at each level are subject to ongoing scrutiny, enabled to engage constructively in deliberative forums, and accountable to those affected by their decisions under a system that can administer sanctions against misconduct.

Nine. Safeguard peaceful community challenges

Remove obstacles to peaceful community challenges, such as branding criticisms of government policies as inherently biased, or treating opposition as security threats. Support and respond to questions about public actions, but guard against disruptive and intimidatory practices to stop these from being deployed under false pretences to end rather than promote cooperative discussions.



ABOUT THE BOOK

It is increasingly recognised that instead of relying on top-down commands or leaving individuals to their own devices, communities should be given a role in tackling challenges exacerbated by global crises.

Written by a team of leading experts with in-depth knowledge and on-the-ground experience, this book sets out why and how people's lives can be positively transformed through diverse forms of community involvement.

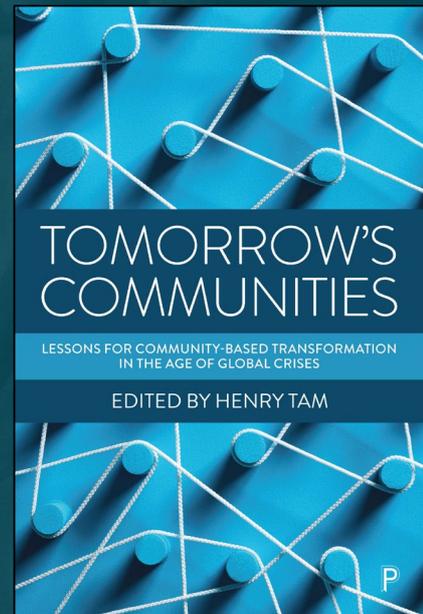
This book critically explores examples from around the world of how communities can become more collaborative and resilient in dealing with the problems they face, and provides an invaluable guide to what a holistic policy agenda for community-based transformation should encompass.

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