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Department of Family and Community Services



Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004

Community Capacity Building

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Contents

1	Summary	1
2	Aspects of Community Capacity: human, social, institutional and economic capital	3
	2.1 Why is Community Capacity Important?	3
	2.2 Defining community capacity	4
	2.3 Why is it useful to identify the different aspects of community capacity?	5
	2.4 What is different about the Strategy approach to capacity building?	6
	2.5 How is the term community being used for the purpose of this paper?	7
	2.6 Descriptions and illustrations of human, social, institutional, economic and natural capital	7
	2.7 The Strategy Outcomes Framework and its relationship to the various types of capital	27
	2.8 The importance of interplay amongst the various types of capital	30
3	Processes for planning the development, use and sustainability of community capacity	35
4	Issue 3: General versus issue-specific capacity building	53
	4.1 Identifying an issue to work on and developing capacity as part of working on that issue	53
	4.2 Identifying capacity with a view to then identifying issues or opportunities to which the capacity could be applied	55
	4.3 Developing capacity with no direct connection to particular issues.	56
5	Implications	58
	5.1 Implications of the analysis of different types of capital: human, social, institutional and economic	58
	5.2 Making the links between building capacity and stronger communities	61
	5.3 Sequencing the processes for planning and implementing a capacity building project	62
	5.4 General versus issue-specific capacity building processes	63
	5.5 Processes for identifying what capacity is available and what needs to be developed	64
	5.6 Application to Indigenous communities – further research needed	65
6	References	67

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1 Summary

There is increasing interest throughout government in Australia and internationally in building community capacity – the combined influence of a community’s commitment, resources and skills that can be deployed to build on community strengths and address community problems and opportunities. One of the principles underpinning the Strategy is the importance of building community capacity to strengthen families and communities.

In this paper we discuss three important issues in effectively building and maintaining community capacity.

Firstly, we discuss four different types of capital that are referred to in the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy’s definition of community capacity:

- human capital (levels of skills, knowledge and health status);
- social capital (networks, norms and trust);
- institutional capital (leadership, capacity to plan and implement projects);
- economic capital (local services, infrastructure and resources).

Other types of capital may also contribute to community capacity (e.g. natural capital and cultural capital). We refer briefly to natural capital and illustrate with an example from one of the case studies that has been conducted as part of the Strategy (namely the Gilles Plains Community Garden). We also refer briefly to cultural capital, noting that it will be discussed in further issues papers concerning capacity building in Indigenous communities.

We show the linkages between the various types of capital and the outcomes framework of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. We also discuss the importance of the interplay amongst these various types of capital when communities are building capacity and drawing on that capacity to become stronger communities.

Secondly, we discuss five processes involved in planning for the development, use and sustainability of community capacity. The processes involve identifying, not necessarily in this order:

- the issues that the community would like to address and/or the opportunities it would like to be able to grasp;
- what capacity currently exists and which elements of capacity (human, social, institutional, economic and/or natural capital) need to be drawn upon, created or enhanced; who or what needs capacity e.g. particular individuals, families, organisations or communities;
- what the community can do to tap into existing capacity within the community and build upon it and how the community can address existing gaps in capacity;

Community Capacity Building

- how the community will be able to apply the increased capacity to address issues and seize opportunities as they arise;
- the processes and conditions that exist and might be required to support and sustain this new or enhanced capacity.

Thirdly, we discuss different strategies for sequencing and combining these various processes to build community capacity and strengthen communities, and how different strategies appear to be appropriate in particular circumstances:

- identifying an issue to work on and developing capacity as part of working on that issue;
- identifying capacity with a view to then identifying issues or opportunities to which the capacity could be applied;
- developing capacity with no direct connection to particular issues.

The paper illustrates all of the above with examples from Strategy funded projects and draws out some implications for the Strategy and for its evaluation.

Particular issues associated with Indigenous communities are addressed in a separate paper.

This paper draws on:

- Published literature concerning community capacity building;
- Information on file for a selection of 20 Strategy funded projects that are being conducted or have been completed (project contracts with FaCS, Progress and Final reports as available). These projects are a source of illustrations and lessons relating to capacity building. However, it is important to recognise that many of the projects and their outcomes may have changed considerably since the time at which data were made available for this report. Hence, this paper neither evaluates nor fully describes those projects.

This paper has been developed as part of the evaluation of the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, which is helping build family and community capacity to deal with challenges and take advantages of opportunities.

The paper is being distributed widely to organisations managing Strategy projects, to staff in the Department of Family and Community Services, and to other interested individuals and organisations to guide the implementation of current projects, to inform future policy and project development, and to guide the evaluation. Feedback on this paper is most welcome, and can be sent to the Evaluation Project Director Dr Patricia Rogers, CIRCLE at RMIT University, 124 Latrobe Street Melbourne VIC 3000, fax (03) 9925 2998, email Patricia.Rogers@rmit.edu.au.

2 Aspects of Community Capacity: human, social, institutional and economic capital

2.1 Why is Community Capacity Important?

Community capacity building is an important principle of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (the Strategy). Community capacity building is about increasing the personal and collective resources of individuals and communities, to help them develop the skills and capacities they need to respond to challenges and to seize opportunities that come their way.

Following their extensive review of the relevant literature and evidence, Black and Hughes (2001) concluded that *community strength* is:

...the extent to which resources and processes within a community maintain and enhance both individual and collective wellbeing in ways consistent with the principles of equity, comprehensiveness, participation, self-reliance and social responsibility.

Community capacity building is about developing and applying those resources and processes.

Gauntlett, Hugman, Kenyon and Logan (2001) proposed a number of characteristics that will be found in strong and healthy communities. These characteristics are another way of identifying what is meant by individual and collective wellbeing, to which Black and Hughes refer in their definition of community strength. In summary, strong communities will be those that:

- Provide a clean safe environment;
- Meet the basic needs of residents;
- Comprise residents that respect and support each other;
- Involve the community in local government;
- Promote and celebrate their historical and cultural heritage;
- Provide easily accessible health services;
- Possess a diverse, innovative economy;
- Rest on a sustainable ecosystem.

Community capacity can contribute to the improvement of all these various aspects of individual and collective wellbeing.

Some 'processes' and features that typically come under the umbrella of *community capacity* are those that have been identified by Kenyon and Black (2001):

Community Capacity Building

- Strong leadership;
- Strong and productive networks within and with other communities;
- The ability to build on existing assets and resources (human, social, economic and environmental);
- A 'can do' spirit and optimism about the future (creating opportunities);
- The ability to grasp opportunities that come their way;
- A sense of belonging to the community amongst its members;
- The ability to embrace change and take responsibility for local outcomes.

Gauntlett, Hugman, Kenyon and Logan (2000, viii) also identified the following as keys to building healthier and therefore stronger communities:

- Structures in place to identify community leaders and other highly motivated community members; and
- The inputs of relevant professionals working in the community are mobilised and where these skills are utilised in a multi-disciplinary framework.

2.2 Defining community capacity

More specifically the Strategy defines capacity at a community level as the potential for action arising out of the interplay between:

- human capital (levels of skills, knowledge and health status);
- social and institutional capital (leadership, motivation, networks); and
- economic capital (local services, infrastructure and resources).

The first issue that we address in this paper concerns what is involved in these various types of capital. Here we distinguish between social and institutional capital. In social capital we focus on networks, norms and trust. In institutional capital we focus on leadership and community capacity to plan, implement and support projects.

The Strategy definition refers specifically to human, social, institutional and economic capital. Accordingly, our review of projects focused on these various types of capital. However it is important to recognise that an increasing number of other types of capital are discussed in the literature (e.g. environmental capital, natural capital, cultural capital, spiritual capital, personal capital).

To illustrate the significance of one of these other types of capital as a component of community capacity we have included a brief discussion of natural capital, drawing on a case study that has been prepared as part of the Strategy, that of a local community garden. Aspects of cultural capital will be addressed in other issues papers relating to capacity building in Indigenous communities.

2.3 Why is it useful to identify the different aspects of community capacity?

There are several reasons that it is useful to identify the different aspects of community capacity, including the following:

- Understanding more about the different aspects of community capacity can be useful in providing a framework for analysing and appreciating the scope of expectations and of achievements of the Strategy.
- A better appreciation of the potential to develop different types of capacity can also be useful for expanding the horizons of those communities that are tending to focus on just one or two aspects of capacity. In some cases, attention to a wider array of types of capacity could enhance the success and impacts of their projects.
- In practice any given capacity building activity may be simultaneously contributing to the development of several aspects of community capacity. A review of the sample of projects supports the notion that managing the interplay amongst all the different types of capitals can be more productive in achieving strategy outcomes than focusing just on one type of capital.

Communities can actively capitalise on the potential of their projects to address several aspects of capacity so that they can achieve results on several fronts 'by good management' rather than just 'by good luck'. Managing the interplay amongst these different aspects can be important when strengthening communities. Being aware of the different types of capacity is a forerunner of managing this interplay.

A lot of work has been done on various aspects of community capacity. This paper draws on that work but does not repeat it. A list of references is provided for those who wish to investigate further. Two documents in the list provide particularly useful overviews of the capacity building literature, namely Black and Hughes (2001) and Chapman and Kirk (2001).

For the purposes of this paper we have chosen to work with the concept of different types of 'capital' as identified in the Strategy principle. Use of the term and concept of 'capital' reflects the fact that the components of community capacity can be thought of as different types of resources that the community has at its disposal.

However it is important to recognise that there are other ways of thinking about community capacity that do not explicitly involve the concept of 'capital'. One of the more frequently used definitions is that of the Aspen Institute (1996) which identifies the following four key elements of community capacity:

- *commitment*: the community-wide will to act, based on a shared awareness of problems, opportunities and workable solutions;
- *resources*: financial, natural and human assets and the means to deploy them intelligently and fairly;
- *knowledge*: having the information and guidelines that will ensure the best use of these resources; and
- *skills*: including the talents, expertise and governance structures and processes of individuals and organisations that can be drawn upon to address problems and seize opportunities.

We find that all of these elements are incorporated in one or other of human, social, institutional and economic capital. Other definitions, such as that of the London Regeneration Network (1999), tend to focus on one type of capital or another (e.g. social capital only) and can therefore be somewhat limiting. We make reference to some of these other more limited definitions in our discussion of the various types of capital.

2.4 What is different about the Strategy approach to capacity building?

A key principle of the Strategy is that it endeavours to assist communities to identify and build on existing strengths and grasp opportunities for the application of that capacity. In general it discourages deficit-based approaches.

Another principle that is relevant to capacity building is the principle that solutions that come from the ground up not only produce results that are owned and used by the families and communities that need them, but tend also to generate further skills and capacity in the process. *Local solutions and local management for sustainable processes and outcomes* are key concepts.

Community consultation, community support, community involvement and community management are advocated by the SFCS as strategies to ensure that a project is really needed and wanted by the community, that community 'ownership of the project' ensues and that capacity acquired and applied is sustainable.

This is a new approach for Government. In the past, Government has more typically offered or imposed top-down standardised solutions. Smith and Davies (2001) comment that very often these approaches were not focused at the right level. They did not foster partnerships and did not take adequate account of communities' own views about their problems, or their capacities to address those problems and potential solutions.

This paper discusses the experiences of some of the Strategy-funded projects in applying these principles and the circumstances under which the principles appear to have worked more effectively and less effectively.

2.5 How is the term community being used for the purpose of this paper?

In discussing community capacity it is important to note that the term 'community' is used in many different ways¹. A community can be centred around and defined in terms of:

- Location – such as suburbs, regions or small rural towns;
- Interest – such as political associations, sporting teams, work related interests;
- Other shared identity – such as ethnic origin, disability, gender, age, religion.

All of these types of community are represented amongst Strategy-funded projects and amongst the projects that we reviewed for this paper. Many projects are undertaken in relation to, or by a combination of, different types of communities (e.g. youth in a particular region combines a community of location with a community of other shared identity).

Engagement of a community in capacity building assumes that there is already some shared sense of community and that explicitly or implicitly the community has defined its interests and its boundaries for the purpose of capacity building. In our discussion of community capacity, we enter at the point at which some sense of identity already exists and we do not explore the processes by which a group of people or organisations come together to think of themselves as a community.

2.6 Descriptions and illustrations of human, social, institutional, economic and natural capital

The Strategy's definition of community capacity identifies human, social, institutional and economic capital as key components of community capacity. We now go on to describe these in a little more detail and also to illustrate each with examples from Strategy projects. We also include an example relating to natural capital.

Human capital as a component of community capacity

'Capacity building' is sometimes used to refer primarily to the development of *human capital*. Black and Hughes (2001, p56) define human capital as:

...the human beings in a community, their physical and mental health, their knowledge and skills, and their capacity to contribute through production, decision-making, social interaction, innovation and in other ways to the life of the community

The issue of human capital is important, for it relates to the ability of individuals and groups within the community to undertake activities through which other forms of capital – for example, Produced Economic Capital – can be developed or produced.

¹ The Strategy Glossary defines a community as.....

SERC (2002, p13) reports that human capital is measured by:

- Skills and knowledge;
- Capacity to adjust to changing circumstances;
- Ability to contribute through participation;
- Social interaction and decision-making;
- Management of health and disability.

Human capital is very much about enhancing the capacity of individuals to contribute to the community. A wide variety of activities can be used to develop human capital:

- Some are formal and others are informal and incidental;
- Some are about developing general capacity for use in a variety of situations and others are more applied and contextualised. We address this distinction and its implications in more detail later in our discussion.

Activities explored in the questionnaires to be completed by all Strategy projects that are likely to be particularly relevant to the development of human capital include:

- Mentoring;
- Training²;
- Counselling and other assistance.

These activities have a strong focus on human capital and their identification provides a framework for analysing questionnaire data that relates to human capital. However, these same activities may also be used to develop social and institutional capital.

For example, a mentoring project may develop skills and confidence of individuals but it may also *incidentally* assist them to develop or tap into networks that might not only benefit them as individuals but also their communities. Such a mentoring project, whose prime focus is the development of human capital, can also *deliberately* look for ways to promote networking (social capital) in the course of developing human capital. It may find that with very little extra effort it can concurrently develop several types of capacity.

Similarly many of the activities that are used to develop social and economic capital will also produce outcomes relating to human capital. For example, while action research is often about improving social and institutional capital, participants in action research will probably develop some human capital in that they will learn something about action research processes. Once again, this learning may be incidental to the action research process or an intentional aspect of it.

² It is noteworthy that many people narrowly equate capacity building with training. Not only are they narrowing the scope of capacity building to human capital but within human capital they are focusing on a particular technique to develop capital.

Project experience

Almost all of the projects selected for review as part of this issues paper included some element of human capacity building either as their primary focus or as a secondary benefit. Box 1 includes some examples of projects working on building human capital.

The examples that we found amongst the projects related primarily to development of those aspects of human capital that relate to the development of self confidence, attitudes, knowledge and skills rather than, say, physical health. However we are aware that many Strategy projects also deliver benefits in relation to physical health. The community garden project that is the subject of a case study as part of this evaluation is a case in point.

Box 1: Examples of Projects Working on Building Human Capital

Volunteer Training and Development

This project provided:

- generalist and specialist training and skills development for emergency relief volunteers (e.g. knowledge of occupational health and safety, skills in working with specific target groups);
- policies, manuals and directories for emergency relief sector.

Feedback from the courses stimulated problem-solving activities amongst participants and linked participants into other training programs.

Volunteers returned to their organisations with a better awareness of their rights and responsibilities and were asking questions about agency policy. They had increased their knowledge of other agencies in the area, how they operate and what they provide.

Resident Leadership Project

This project provided training to develop skills and involve residents and non-traditional leaders in community life on public housing estates in the Macarthur region.

At least 70% of participants who attended training reported that the training had increased leadership competencies such as decision-making and priority setting. They provided examples of how they had been able to apply these competencies. Participants had identified new training needs and some had commenced accredited training as a result of their participation in the leadership program.

Development of a Mentoring Program for Young People

The mentoring program provided training and support to mentors who in turn worked with disadvantaged youths to develop skills, motivation and leadership potential.

Activities allowed alternative and positive modelling of behaviour and strategies to deal with situations. It was a chance to develop life skills in communication, conflict management, assertiveness and speaking up for opinions, working with others in a team. Of participants surveyed:

- 94% reported that the program had provided them with a positive role model;
- 91% reported that the program had helped them;
- 89% reported that they had learned new things;
- Most said the program had increased their belief in themselves and potential to achieve and had positively changed their attitude to schools and to other students.

More detailed results of the survey are included in the project reports.

Social capital as a component of community capacity

Social capital has been defined by Putnam (2000) as follows:

Social capital refers to connections amongst individuals – social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.

Similarly, SERC (2002 p1) in its report to FaCS on 'Assessing Community Strength – a proposed set of indicators and measures' comments that:

There are two aspects to social capital. The first refers to social structures or social networks and the second to the norms governing behaviour in those social structures and social networks.

Occasionally, community capacity building is equated with building social capital e.g. the London Regeneration Network (1999):

Capacity building in this context will refer to the empowerment of whole communities, where all partners will learn to work together effectively to add value to their own activities. Without capacity building at all these levels, the concept of joined-up thinking and joined-up action will be meaningless.

'Social capital' has become an area of study in its own right as has the measurement of social capital (see Stone and Hughes, 2002, SERC, 2002). We refer the reader to the references concerning social capital since it would not be possible to do them justice within the scope of this paper.

In brief, many concepts have developed around social capital such as those identified by Black and Hughes (2001, p61-62):

- *Patterns of processes and relationships* including whether relationships concern social participation, civic participation, involvement in not for profit organisations and volunteering, linkages with other types of organisations and expert systems. Each of these types of processes has its own concepts. For example, social participation can involve bonding capital (bonds with family and friends) and/or bridging capital (bridges with acquaintances who provide wider linkages e.g. to businesses, other organisations, other communities).
- *Qualities of processes* including whether the processes are characterised by trust, altruism, reciprocity, norms, tolerance and belief in equality of opportunity, a sense of belonging in the community, and self-reliance and self-help.
- *Structures* that govern or enhance processes including leadership and means for resolving conflict at individual, group or community levels.

We pick up on this third aspect of Black and Hughes' definition in our discussion of institutional capital.

Social capital is certainly a very important component of community capacity but as our discussion of human, institutional and economic capital shows, community capacity is much more than social capital. Moreover, social capital may also be a by-

product of other capacity building exercises such as development of leadership and skills, (institutional and human capital).

For example, Gauntlett, Hugman, Kenyon and Logan (2000, viii) reporting their '*Meta-analysis of the impact of community based prevention and early intervention action*' concluded that :

The building of social capital through community based programs is facilitated where opportunities exist:

- To enable skills development in areas such as organising groups, running meetings, lobbying, the writing of grant applications and so on;*
- To enable the identification of funding sources and the capacity to bid for these funds*
- To build better links with other community groups and organisations, to publicise achievements and in turn to access information about other communities' achievements.*

In so doing they are distinguishing between social capital and some factors that can assist with the development of social capital, namely some aspects of human and institutional capital.

A wide variety of activities can be used to develop social capital. Activities explored in the questionnaires to be completed by all Strategy projects that are particularly relevant to the development of social capital include:

- Networks / linkages;
- Community consultation;
- Bringing community members together;
- Significant community/cultural events (a certain level of social capital may be required in advance to make these work).

Examples of aspects of social capital that are explored with projects as part of the questionnaires to be completed by all Strategy projects include:

- other services or activities within the community including relevant activities undertaken by other organisations before and during the project;
- Identifying and responding to community issues.

Project experience

Most of the projects that were reviewed for this paper were either deliberately working to develop social capital and/or reported the development of social capital as an outcome or benefit of their participation in the Strategy. Some examples of projects that developed social capital are included in Box 2.

Community involvement is an important aspect of and indicator of social capital. Projects reviewed for this paper commented on the importance of having community involvement and support from the outset of their projects. Their comments affirm the Strategy principle of local solutions to local problems and community involvement in identifying and working on those local solutions.

Conversely, lack of social capital (in the form of community support and involvement) at the outset of the project was sometimes an impediment to progress. Several projects reported that they had had some difficulty in engaging the community and commented that:

- it takes considerable time (longer than they had expected) to engage the community;
- it may involve change of direction as various options are pursued;
- innovative approaches need to be used to capture the community's imagination;
- it is important to obtain diverse and sustained participation by members of the community;
- it is important to maintain project momentum.

Some projects will be inherently more likely to involve a wider cross section of the community. For example, mentoring projects involve both mentors and mentored. When mentors have been encouraged to develop their own management structures and processes then their involvement is more likely to continue beyond the immediate project. Similarly mentors typically bring their own networks and these networks also have the potential to widen community involvement.

Other projects by virtue of working on several different aspects of capacity (human, social, institutional and economic) will also be more likely to bring in a wider range of community members. Examples of such projects are discussed in section 2.8 concerning the interplay amongst the various types of capital.

Projects that endeavour to identify the full range of community assets also have the potential to draw in many parts of the community. However as our discussion (in section 3 of this paper) of processes for assessing existing capacity shows, it can be difficult to engage the interest of all segments of the community to the same degree.

A project which had run in several communities noted that, in its experience, most of the community sits back and observes before it makes a commitment to get involved. This project further commented that it is the least or only moderately disadvantaged members of the community that tend to get involved first. Greater representation is obtained from lower socio-economic segments as the project progresses.

Community Capacity Building

Broadening community involvement beyond those with a direct role (e.g. steering committee members) was also a challenge that some projects had recognised and addressed (e.g. by community wide promotion of the project, use of networks to achieve the 'pebble in the pond' effect, newsletters, community events).

Several projects identified barriers to participation (e.g. time and location, confidence, competing priorities, previous negative experiences, language, competition with Centrelink requirements associated with benefits).

Another project concentrating on leadership commented that potential participants in training were discouraged by the fact that too many workers were wanting to work with them already and that training would only make them more in demand. As part of its action research, this project also raised useful questions for the Strategy as a whole:

Why do some practices fail to engage a wide range of stakeholders in the community and why do some succeed?

Why do some practices seem rather tired and uninspiring whereas others seem to generate huge amounts of energy, ideas and action?

Box 2: Examples of Projects Working on Building Social Capital

Community Leadership Project

This project endeavoured to enhance social and economic participation of caravan park residents both within their micro environment (the caravan park) and within the broader community, foster a sense of community in the park and improve social and economic outcomes. Amongst other things the project aimed to foster:

- a habit of co-operating in solving issues that arise in the parks;
- greater resident participation in asset based management; and
- greater resident responsibility for initiating and managing projects that respond to identified needs.

Amidst daily crises that occur in caravan parks, it had sometimes been difficult to establish and maintain levels of participation and enthusiasm in resident groups. However, four new groups had been formed and were operating without assistance.

Mutual Community Support

Amongst other things, this project promoted the sharing of information and fostering of linkages amongst services, groups and individuals (e.g. through data bases, newsletters, service provider happy hours). The linkages would connect like-minded groups, and by linking service providers with local initiatives would provide opportunities for participation in local initiatives.

These various linkages would result in better strategic planning, reduction of the costs of service provision through removal of duplication and enhancement of feedback amongst the services (i.e. enhancement of institutional capital).

An example of the application of these processes is that a prospect emerged of establishing a soup kitchen for disadvantaged and homeless people with the Salvation Army and other service providers. The long-term goal was for it to develop into a drop in centre with computer access and various living skill opportunities such as cooking budgeting and hygiene.

Health Conference

This conference provided opportunities to share good practice and to network amongst communities, strengthening the achievements of an earlier conference (a combination of human, institutional and social capital).

The conference provided resources and support to otherwise socially and professionally isolated unpaid and paid workers.

Most participants reported that the conference had helped to develop networks and that they had received ideas to take back to their communities. Communities that had previously lacked confidence to host the conferences are offering to do so in future.

Institutional capital as a component of community capacity

Community activities and projects are undertaken by groups, organisations or institutions. Institutional capacity refers to the capacity that these various parties need to successfully plan, implement and sustain projects and activities.

As noted earlier, institutional capital is somewhat similar to Black and Hughes' description of structures that govern and enhance processes of interaction within a community (Black and Hughes, 2001 p 62 and 119-128) and factors identified by Gauntlett *et al* as conducive to the development of social capital. However, we find it useful to think of social capital primarily in the terms that Putnam defines it (social networks and norms) and to analyse institutional capital separately.

Sometimes communities that have no history of developing and applying capacity wish to address very difficult issues (social, economic, cultural etc). Sometimes they need to go through a process of 'getting ready' to plan and manage projects and activities to address these issues. To do this they often need various types of institutional capital.

To help such communities to appreciate what may be involved in getting ready, it may be useful to draw to their attention a distinction between upstream capacity and downstream capacity. This distinction is discussed in Funnell (1998) and adapted in Box 3 that follows:

- *upstream capacity* is what is required to *establish and design* capacity building and community strengthening projects; and
- *downstream capacity* is what is required to *deliver* the projects.

It is to be expected that the development of both types of capacity will be present amongst Strategy projects. Communities that do not have a history of involvement in capacity building and community strengthening projects may well have to work on developing upstream capacity first. The list of required types of capacity may seem somewhat daunting but neither all communities nor all projects will need those various types of capacity to the same degree. They are presented as a checklist for communities to look at and consider the relevance of the items to their situation.

Other research and commentaries that support the importance of institutional capacity building are presented below.

Black, Ainsworth, Hughes and Wilson (2002), in their evaluation of the Family and Community Networks Initiative (FCNI) of FaCS, identified various factors that characterised those projects that had received a high success rating by State and Territory Officers. Many of these factors related to institutional capital. They included:

- Strong well-established auspicing agencies;
- Committed and tenacious staff, able to relate well to a range of people in the target community;
- A clear understanding of project concepts and directions;
- A good fit between the FCNI project and existing activities;
- A high level of community or client support for the project;

Community Capacity Building

- A previous history of networking and/or successful activities with client groups;
- Good monitoring and reporting procedures.

Projects that were rated as less successful tended to be lacking in one or more of these features. The current evaluation of the Strategy further explores the applicability of these factors within the context of a larger and more diverse range of community capacity building projects funded by the Strategy and looks for additional factors.

Gauntlett, Hugman, Kenyon and Logan (2000, viii) identified structural issues, such as the following, as keys to building healthier and therefore stronger communities:

- Structures in place to identify community leaders and other highly motivated community members; and
- The inputs of relevant professionals working in the community are mobilised and are utilised in a multi-disciplinary framework.

Box 3 Components of Community Capacity (Funnell 1998)

Upstream Capacity

Infrastructure: social, institutional and physical

- existence of appropriate community structures and relationships e.g. networks, clubs other functioning groups (social capital);
- existence of appropriate facilities and resources and a willingness to draw on them;
- access to telecommunications and other services.

Strategic capacity

- clearly identified effective leaders ;
- capacity to take a strategic and holistic approach to planning;
- capacity to use a range of activities and to adapt those to changing needs.

Skills – project design and management

- consultation and involvement skills and mechanisms; capacity to engage a wide spectrum of the community such that the community projects are not unduly influenced by factions or excessively parochial;
- skills and willingness to assess needs including the use of service users' and local providers' knowledge;
- skills and procedures in planning, budgeting, and project management;
- skills in procurement e.g. the appointment of consultants, the adjudication of tenders and awarding of contracts, the commissioning of services ;
- skills in personnel management including the employment of staff for administration, operation and maintenance;
- skills in performance measurement, evaluation (especially self-evaluation for continuous improvement) and accountability.

Downstream Capacity

Information and networking

- access to information e.g. about needs, projections, alternative strategies, research
- availability and use of networking opportunities;
- shared understanding of the problem within the community.

Skills – delivery

- diversity, strength and depth of the skills base of the community with respect to service delivery: e.g. range of portfolios whose needs can be addressed;
- skills in identifying and mobilising community resources, including volunteers;
- availability of support for volunteers;
- capacity and willingness to nurture a strong human resource base in the community through training, replacements and other mechanisms.

Opportunities and risk factors: Other features of the community

- availability of 'time' within the community to commit to design and delivery.
- the composition of the community: communities with high levels of unemployed, benefit recipients, aged, disabled or ethnic groups experience severe difficulties in mobilising and maintaining impact and are disadvantaged in access to information;
- the extent to which a community can be defined;
- turnover within the community and the capacity to retain the skills base;
- the size of the community and whether it has sufficient critical mass to generate and maintain the range of activities needed; its vulnerability to movements of skilled citizens in and out of the community.

Similarly, Duncan and Thomas (2000) refer to community capacity building as:

...development work which strengthens the ability of community based organisations and groups to build their structures, systems and skills. This enables them to better define and achieve their objectives and engage in consultation, planning and development and management. It also helps them to take an active and equal role in the partnerships with other organisations and agencies. Capacity building includes aspects of training, consultancy, organisational and personal development, mentoring and peer group support, organised in a planned manner and based on the principles of empowerment and equality.

We recognise that some communities need to develop some basic institutional capacity before they can move on to projects that will directly assist them to strengthen the wellbeing of their community. This observation reinforces the fact that all forms of capital can be either (or both) an outcome of capacity building projects and a prerequisite for their successful design and/or implementation.

One of the initiatives of the Strategy is specifically about leadership. Development of leaders within institutions or organisations (or organisations that are about to form) can be considered as a form of institutional capacity. With respect to supporting community leaders, and by implication, developing institutional capital, Chapman and Kirk (2001, p 27) report on examples of training requested by community leaders:

- developing community organisations including choosing appropriate structures, establishing goals and team building;
- developing business plans through scenario building, book keeping, fund raising, cash flows and employing workers;
- promoting equal opportunities by mobilising diversity, recruiting members and employees and opening organisational culture;
- training in people skills such as dealing with change and conflict (including blame from the community and personal attacks) and committee skills (including dealing with dominant personalities who keep control of meetings);
- providing information technology training in word processing, spread sheets, e-mail, video-conferencing and websites.

Chapman and Kirk further suggest that training may be needed in:

- group work and training on the roles and responsibilities of office bearers;
- running effective meetings and managing people, including interpersonal skills and alternative ways of structuring meetings around community issues.

Questionnaires to be completed by all Strategy projects seek information from projects about several issues that relate to the development of institutional capital and the effects of its existence on the success of projects. These include:

- engagement of the project in action research;

Community Capacity Building

- other activities undertaken by the auspicing organisations before and during the project;
- previous experience with other projects;
- support from the auspice organizations;
- management systems and processes;
- infrastructure and facilities;
- ability to respond to target group or project participants;
- ability to find and work with partners;
- likelihood of taking on new activities in the future. (This may reflect enhanced institutional capacity to do so.)

Project experience

Amongst the projects that were reviewed for this paper there were several examples of direct attempts to use training or direct assistance to develop these types of institutional capacity. Some examples are included in Box 4.

Other projects, while not directly focussing on institutional development, saw such development occurring as an additional benefit of undertaking a capacity building project.

Box 4: Examples of projects working on the development of institutional capital

A Resident Leadership Project: Provided courses in leadership competencies including those relating to setting priorities and making decisions.

Development of Skills Training to Support the Unemployed: Co-operatives were given assistance to access funds e.g. assistance with writing business plans and development of skills to do this.

A Rural Development Program: The community determined that it needed practical skills for community development (primarily aimed at community co-ordinators) e.g. how to recognise success, how to attract funding, writing applications and lobbying, how to engage volunteers, understanding the role of communication in community development, using publicity, problem solving, time management, conflict management, quality management, delegation and task sharing and public speaking skills.

A Management Support service Feasibility Study: As part of this study a trial website was established and is being used.

A Community Facilitator: The facilitator developed a strategic plan for the City Council in consultation with the community. The plan identified areas of concern for the community that would provide a basis for preparing funding submissions to FaCS and others for capacity building projects. A total of 41 strategies and 85 specific actions were identified. These were classified within 8 areas of community development.

Projects reviewed for this paper identified the following additional aspects of institutional capital as having affected the success of their capacity building efforts. These factors supplement those reported earlier by Black *et al* in their review of FCNI:

- Group formation and management;
- Staff and volunteer management;
- The importance of selecting the right facilitator;
- Processes used by facilitators;
- Action research.

Group formation and management

Group formation and management included such issues as:

- selecting steering committee members;
- developing trust within the group;
- managing tensions between ‘planners, doers and documenters’;
- running meetings and coping with full agendas while at the same time nurturing networking through informality, social events and time out.

One project in particular commented on these issues.

Staff and volunteer management

Staff and volunteer management was about addressing such issues as:

- how to prevent burnout and to keep spirits high when members of the community seem to be apathetic to the project or pre-occupied with their own crises and daily concerns;
- how to manage the absence of key players e.g. annual leave for paid personnel; sporadic involvement of volunteers.

The importance of selecting the right facilitator

Several projects identified selection of the right facilitator as important by several projects. Some commented (on the basis of having done otherwise) that it is essential to be prepared to use more time consuming systematic processes to select facilitators rather than relying solely on personal recommendation. A facilitator with a good understanding of the local community was also seen as important.

Processes used by facilitators.

Willingness to be flexible and work out of hours can be important to enable members of the community to participate at a time that suits them. Personal style and its congruity with the perceptions and aspirations of community members can be important.

Action research

Action research is a form of institutional learning and capacity building. Several of the projects we reviewed were formally engaging in action research and/or adopting a reflective learning process in relation to their projects.

Some projects had also undertaken a considerable amount of conceptual analysis, relating their work to the literature and professional practices around capacity building. Examples of projects undertaking such formal analysis are included in Box 5.

While the projects were generally enthusiastic about their action research activities (they found the process interesting) it was not always clear whether the action research was a key factor in the success or otherwise of their projects.

Box 5: Projects that were testing or reflecting on different models

The report on *Resident Training and Leadership program* incorporated an action research report that posed questions concerning which of three models of community capacity building was being applied. The three models referred to in the report were:

- Trust, reciprocity, exchange and membership (Putnam, Cox, Onyx, Bullen etc – strong emphasis on social capital);
- Domains of problem assessment, action learning and asking why (Labonte, Laverack, Eberhard and Wenzel – strong emphasis on process and in particular cognitive learning and application of learning);
- Domains of activity – community economic development, community business partnerships, social entrepreneurship and fostering micro-business (McClure - strong emphasis on economic and social capital).

Unfortunately, it was not clear from the report how the action research was used to guide the project or reflect on its success.

An external evaluation reported on an attempt to trial 'Work Study Circles' (an approach used by the Centre for Rural Communities). Although the implementation process did not go according to plan, the project had begun to work with the Centre to rewrite a Young People's Study Circle Kit using the stories and experiences of the project. The evaluation also commented on some difficulties in the project arising from the fact that different stakeholders adhered to different models of change namely:

- community capacity building models;
- rural revitalisation approaches; and
- personal and business development approaches.

The successive stages of the project reflected the different perspectives of the different stakeholders and their degree of influence at each stage. The evaluation cautioned that judgment should only be made about the effectiveness of the various approaches when a long term assessment can be made of impacts on jobs and on the towns.

A project trialled the Asset Based Community Development Model (ABCD model) documented in a book by Kretzman and McKnight 'Building Communities from within'.

As part of building institutional capital, communities can deliberately consider and assess the relevance to their own circumstances of the various factors that have been identified in the literature and in the review of projects.

Institutional awareness of the way contextual factors operate in their community may help them to think about how they can access, develop and use capacity. Chapman and Kirk in their review of research evidence (in the UK and elsewhere) concerning community capacity building concluded that contextual factors including community support and involvement play a significant role in the development and use of community capacity (2001, p16). The particular contextual factors that Chapman and Kirk identified were:

- Community capacity building does not happen in isolation from wider strategic policy developments (in Australia, the welfare reform processes would be an example of a wider strategic policy development to which community capacity could be applied and provides a rationale for selection of which aspects of capacity to develop);
- Pressure on communities to be consulted on a range of new initiatives and programs can result in communities suffering from participation fatigue. (This factor is also relevant to the processes by which communities identify issues and aspects of capacity that are to be developed.)
- Building upon previous partnership structures and activities promotes continuity and helps to sustain regeneration effort;
- Encouraging active citizenship is consistent with efforts to empower local communities and to encourage participation in the regeneration process (This factor is also relevant to the processes by which communities identify issues and aspects of capacity that are to be developed.)
- Community involvement does not replace local governance structures but enhances the scope for people to be involved in the development of their communities (Working with local government rather than duplicating what it does would appear to be a sensible strategy. Several Strategy projects are working for or closely with local government.)
- The private sector has a vital role to play in supporting community-based organisations in developing their own capacity and skills. (There may be additional opportunities to draw in the private sector.)

Economic capital as a component of community capacity

An important dimension of community capacity, captured in the Strategy principle is that relating to *economic capital*. Black and Hughes (2001, p50) state that:

The economic resources of a community have a major impact on its wellbeing and its ability to achieve various objectives.

Black and Hughes (2001) and SERC (2002) refer more specifically to 'produced economic capital' which is seen as relating to three areas:

Community Capacity Building

- Economic resources associated with individuals, families and households (that is, income, home ownership);
- Economic resources associated with businesses and other organisations (that is investment in infrastructure);
- Infrastructure and public facilities within a community (that is, hard infrastructure such as roads, social infrastructure such as hospitals and soft infrastructure such as medical professionals).

As for other types of capital, it is important to distinguish between:

- economic capital that is an *input* for a project (e.g. purchase of necessary equipment using Strategy funds); and
- economic capital that is an *outcome* for a project (e.g. establishment of new business contracts; reduced dependence on welfare).

Activities explored in the questionnaires to be completed by all Strategy projects that are particularly relevant to the development of economic capital include:

- Distributing facilities / resources;
- Assistance to participate in other activities.

Project experience

Some examples of projects that developed economic capital are included in Box 6. Both examples relate to economic resources associated with individuals (income: employment related and access to finance) but involve the development of organisations or networks through which individual and collective economic capital can be improved.

Box 6: Examples of Projects Working on Economic Capacity Building

Finance Assistance Initiative

This project was to assist low income disconnected and financially vulnerable individuals to access micro-finance schemes.

It had made small no interest loans of up to \$500 available to community members and planned to establish buyers' clubs, and incentive schemes. The loans were also for skills development in leadership and community development through management of the scheme by community members (i.e. development of human and social capital to support development of economic capital).

Through establishing, over time, trusting relationships between borrowers and the fund (social capital), four participants had been identified as a starting group for discussion of a saving and loans groups and two community members had been identified as credit committee members.

Some links had been established with local businesses but support from banks had not been forthcoming at the time the project prepared its reports.

Assistance to Support the Unemployed

Co-operatives, networks and partnerships had been established for unemployed people to obtain paid employment e.g. through community enterprise projects. The project was working in six communities and commented that the rate and nature of progress varied from community to community.

The project reported that, overall, progress was slow because this was essentially community development work. Another reason given for slow progress was that the concept of community based economic development was new for many communities.

The Victorian State Government had become attracted to the idea and had committed substantial funds for community enterprise projects to address long-term unemployment. This project was expected to play a significant role in the State Government Program and its report explains why it was favourably positioned to do so.

Natural capital as another aspect of community capacity

Black and Hughes (2001) refer to Hart's (2000) identification of three types of natural capital:

- natural resources - those things that we can take from the natural environment and use either in their raw form or in production processes. They include water, plants, animals, minerals and fossil fuels.
- ecosystem services – natural processes on which we depend in some way e.g. the processes whereby trees convert carbon dioxide into oxygen and sequester carbon;
- the aesthetics or beauty of nature – those aspects of nature that are appreciated for their beauty, such as birds and flowers, rivers, mountains.

Communities may be motivated to preserve, enhance or make better use of their natural environment. This motivation may give rise to various projects or activities that

in turn draw on and/or develop other forms of capacity. Community interest in the environment can provide a rallying point for diverse groups in the community to pursue their individual and collective interests (environmental, economic, social etc).

Community Gardens are an example of a class of projects whose focal point or medium is the natural environment. However these projects contribute to community capacity not only by enhancing natural capital but also by contributing to human, social, institutional and economic capital. To illustrate, in Box 7, we include excerpts from a case study conducted as part of the evaluation of the Strategy.

Box 7: Excerpts from the Community Garden Case Study (adapted)

The community garden literature is replete with examples of the environmental, health, psychological, social and economic benefits that community gardens can provide across a range of individual, family and community domains.

In relation to natural or environmental capacity, research has found that a significant proportion of land in the average city lies vacant and unused because of population and residential shifts due to de-industrialisation, irregular, undeveloped or small land size and changing perceptions of desirable housing (Schukoske, 2000).

Community gardens can directly contribute to improving the urban environment because they 'bring derelict land into productive use, regreen streetscapes and increase wildlife habitat' (Grayson & Campbell, 2000, p2). They also help to promote awareness of organic gardening and permaculture principles that aim to encourage sustainable use of the environment (Crabtree, 1999).

Participants in the community garden, funded by the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, reported environmental outcomes including improved attractiveness of the physical environment, increased awareness of water conservation, waste management, organic gardening and composting.

The garden as a natural resource had given rise to improved sense of wellbeing and satisfaction amongst participants by getting back to nature and was a source of recreational activity for them. Other outcomes reported in the case study related to the development of human, social, institutional and economic capacity.

2.7 The Strategy Outcomes Framework and its relationship to the various types of capital

The Strategy Outcomes Framework (See Figure 1) is presented as a hierarchy of intended outcomes. Higher levels in the hierarchy build on achievements or existing conditions at lower levels.

Although the hierarchy of outcomes is shown as linear there will be many feedback loops reflecting increasing levels of community readiness, and sophistication and widening application of community capacity. For example, a given community may need to have already developed a certain level of trust, resilience and adaptability (level 5) before it could tackle a relatively complex project to develop and apply skills and capacity for initiative (levels 3 and 4).

In broad terms the various levels in the hierarchy of outcomes can be aligned with the different types of capital as follows:

Human capital is most closely aligned with outcomes 3 and 4 in the outcomes framework for the Strategy, with connection to some aspects of outcomes 1 and 2. The italicised parts of each outcome show a connection with human capital:

Outcome 1: *Participation* and enhanced trust via participation, networks and *new ideas*;

Outcome 2: *Greater awareness*, development of partnerships;

Outcome 3: Greater choice, *understanding, skills, capacity for initiative*;

Outcome 4: *Demonstration/application of greater understanding, skills and capacity*.

Social capital is most closely aligned with outcomes 1, 2, 5 and 6 in the outcomes framework for the Strategy:

Outcome 1: Participation and *enhanced trust* via participation, *networks* and new ideas;

Outcome 2: Greater awareness, *development of partnerships*;³

Outcome 5: Family⁴ and *community trust/resilience/adaptability*;

Outcome 6: *An environment where communities participate in and drive their own solutions to strengthen their families and communities*.

Institutional capital is useful for planning and implementing projects and sustaining project processes and outcomes. As such it can be brought to bear in order to achieve outcomes at all levels of the outcomes hierarchy.

3 Partnerships are the subject of another issues paper and are therefore not discussed in detail here

4 This paper focuses on community capacity building and does not specifically address families which will be the focus of other issues papers such as early intervention

Community Capacity Building

For example, institutional capacity could be required to engender participation by target groups (level 1 in the hierarchy). Equally it could be used to plan and undertake projects that were about enhancing trust amongst individuals and groups in the community (level 5 in the hierarchy).

Economic capital as an outcome of Strategy projects is aligned most directly with relevant aspects of outcome 7 'Stronger families and communities' in the framework. An example would be increased financial self-sufficiency of individuals and families.

However, outcome 7 is much more than just about economic capital. According to Gauntlett, Hugman, Kenyon and Logan, strong communities are those that:

- Provide a clean safe environment;
- Meet the basic needs of residents;
- Comprise residents that respect and support each other;
- Involve the community in local government;
- Promote and celebrate their historical and cultural heritage;
- Provide easily accessible health services;
- Possess a diverse, innovative economy;
- Rest on a sustainable ecosystem.

All of these strengths and not just those relating to economic capital could be part of Outcome 7.

FIGURE 1
HIERARCHY OF INTENDED OUTCOMES OF THE SFCS
USED FOR THE EVALUATION AND FOR THE PERFORMANCE INDICATOR FRAMEWORK

7. Stronger Families and Communities

This is about how families and communities apply the strengths from levels 1 to 6 to improve their wellbeing



6. An environment where communities participate in and drive their own solutions to strengthen their families and communities

Participation at Level 6 transcends the participation that occurs in relation to a particular project – Level 1. It goes to the issue of sustainability of community participation and longer term more extensive self-determination



5. Family and community trust/ resilience/adaptability

This is about trust that would transcend the particular project. Whereas Level 1 might be about trust developed on a smaller scale through a particular Strategy project, trust at Level 5 goes to the issue of sustainable levels of trust, willingness to co-operate in future and adaptability as a way of addressing issues as they arise



4. Demonstration/application of greater understanding, skills and capacity for initiative

See Level 3 below. Level 4 'application' includes not just application during the life of the project but also transfer of skills (e.g. leadership, project management, specific skills such as parenting skills) to other family and community issues, opportunities and problems during and after participation in the Strategy project. It implies some sustainability of understanding skills and capacity



3. Greater choice, understanding, skills, capacity for initiative

This includes not just the particular skills etc that might have been the direct target of a project but also the understanding, skills, confidence and capacity acquired by the participants in the course of planning and managing the projects. Capacity would also include newly established partnerships etc. Greater choice could include access to a wider range of services or more appropriate services



2. Greater awareness, development of partnerships

Awareness includes awareness of Strategy, its principles and values as well as subject specific awareness to be developed by projects. The feedback arrow shows that basic awareness of the Strategy is a pre-requisite for participation and participation in turn enhances awareness



1. Participation, enhanced trust

(via participation, networks and new ideas)

Participation includes direct participation in the Strategy and/or the processes of the strategy, including the application process, even if the application is unsuccessful. It refers to extent, range, nature and quality of participation and consultation at the level of the targeted communities and individuals in communities. It also includes participation engendered by the strategy e.g. of volunteers

As an input, economic capital can contribute to other lower level outcomes in the hierarchy and in particular to outcome 3 which includes a reference to greater choice and capacity for initiative.

In addition, the provision of economic capital at a basic level (e.g. the provision of playground equipment, or funding to establish the physical aspects of a community garden) can be a stimulus to the development of other capacity or a rallying point for community interest. Some Strategy projects fund the improvement of infrastructure – businesses, organisations, and public facilities – needed to undertake Strategy and other projects.

2.8 The importance of interplay amongst the various types of capital

Although the outcomes in the Strategy hierarchy of outcomes can be loosely identified with particular types of capital, and it is helpful to think about the various components of capacity, it is also important to take a holistic approach to community capacity.

Taking a holistic approach involves recognising that community capacity is a combination of human, social, institutional and economic capital and that opportunity (including resources and 'permission') is required for it to be exercised in the interests of strengthening a community.

Smith and Davies (2001) comments that:

The degree of community capacity is directly related to the assets of an individual or group and the assets of the social and economic environment. An individual may have a high level of skills and motivation (human capital) but these will not benefit the community if there are no opportunities for the individual to use them.

To make the most of human capital then, social capital (such as networks, trust and leadership), economic capital (such as infrastructure and resources) and environmental capital (local natural resources) need to be developed also.

Lodder and Priest (2002) add that:

Sustainability depends on the interactions of all of these capitals.

In addition, the Strategy and the projects it funds should not assume that development of any given type of capital will necessarily lead to stronger communities. In fact development of a particular type of capital could, as Chapman and Kirk (2001, p 21) show, even have the opposite effect. They refer in particular to the development of social capital:

Linking social capital to community capacity building is a logical and progressive step but it has to be remembered that promoting social capital and individual empowerment can, in the long-term be counter-productive to

the community regeneration process. The strengthening of networks and associations can create exclusion as the most able and dynamic organisations prosper while the less experienced and under-resourced tend to lose out.

It may also be important to ensure that a balance is achieved within each type of capital. Chapman and Kirk's example illustrates how concentrating on one aspect of social capital, namely networking, can be counterproductive if it diminishes focus on other important aspects of social capital such as inclusiveness, equity, and tolerance of diversity.

Similar observations could be made about the development of human and economic capital: they do not necessarily lead to stronger communities. It is therefore important to be continuously assessing the links between the development of the various types of capital and community strength.

Black and Hughes (2001) define *community strength* as :

...the extent to which resources and processes⁵ within a community maintain and enhance both individual and collective wellbeing in ways consistent with the principles of equity, comprehensiveness, participation, self-reliance and social responsibility.

Similarly, Chapman and Kirk's (2001) definition of community capacity building emphasises the importance of developing community capacity with a view to marshalling it to strengthen the community. For these authors, capacity building is:

...the term used to describe the process by which the capability of the community is strengthened in order that it can play a more active role in the economic and social regeneration of their area through long-term ownership of the regeneration process.

Both of the above definitions emphasise that community capacity is a means to an end and that it is only when community capacity is applied as opportunities arise that it can strengthen communities.

Some examples of projects that are developing and inter-relating several types of capital and addressing several levels of outcomes in the overall Strategy outcomes framework, using community capacity to enhance community wellbeing, are shown in boxes 8, 9 and 10.

⁵ community 'resources and processes' is similar to 'community capacity'.

Box 8: Community Renewal Scheme

A project that is developing several types of capital

This project provided accredited training to social housing tenants in regional NSW to develop a local labour force (*human capital*) to access local employment opportunities (*economic capital*) and to establish community based employment co-operative (*social, institutional and economic capital*). At the time of this review, the project had some way to go to achieve its potential. However, it reported outcomes and lessons learnt so far that straddled all 7 levels of the Strategy outcomes framework:

1. *Participation, networking, trust, new ideas*: The process of developing the project had formed linkages, new relationships and new models for co-operation.
2. *Greater awareness, partnership development*: A skills audit was used to develop awareness of skills required for fixed special projects of the Department of Housing (DOH) with which the project was establishing a partnership. This led to the development of a skills inventory for use as part of that partnership. In the course of the audit, members of the community identified several additional areas in which they would like to develop particular employment related accredited training e.g. 38 people identified Certificate 3 in Aged Care as one they would like to undertake (this could also be seen as the beginnings of outcome 6 below)
3. *Greater choice, understanding, skills, capacity for initiative*: Social housing tenants who were unemployed or beneficiaries of other social security income received training to address the needs of the emerging labour pool.
4. *Demonstrate/apply greater understanding, skills, capacity*: participants had been winning tenders through the skills they have identified and developed. Some of the tenders were with the expected partner (DOH) and others were with other partners and businesses.
5. *Family and community trust/resilience/adaptability*: In the light of the experience of this project, a new model had emerged that would form tenants into small co-operatives, provide vocational and small business training, financially assist them and mentor them in their own small businesses from the outset.
6. *Environment where communities participate in and drive their own solutions*: There was evidence of community ownership of this local initiative to improve employment opportunities and to improve the profile of the community. An employment plan had been developed. Retired skilled volunteers would link individuals into local contractors, run job clubs and establish community labour hire co-operatives. The formation of a housing maintenance co-operative to manage contracts and training was underway.
7. *Stronger families and communities – improved wellbeing*: the community had some success in securing external contracts for unemployed social housing tenants to ensure business viability. These contracts not only brought financial remuneration to the contractors but in some cases they also brought physical and social improvements to the area because they were contracts to improve the maintenance of the housing and its environs in which they live.

Box 9:

A project that is developing several types of capital

This program is a project to develop young future community leaders and to stem the drain of youth from the regions. It involved active engagement in real life project based work within a business or organisation, receiving on the job training, working as part of a management team, working as part of or observing a Board of Management, working to timelines and contributing to learning about the community. This project established the program in key regional centres in Victoria: Mildura, Swan Hill and Echuca.

1. *Participation, networking, trust, new ideas:* The project reported high rates of participation by youths and community organisations and increasing diversity amongst participants over the life of the project.
2. *Greater awareness, partnership development:* Partnerships had been developed with a diverse range of community organisations with which youths could work on their projects. Several different types of partnerships had been established and the project reported on what the various partners 'brought to the table' i.e. the roles they played and how they contributed, sponsorship etc.
3. *Greater choice, understanding, skills, capacity for initiative:* Youths had developed skills on the job e.g. for the production of a youth radio program, radio managers trained youths in the use of equipment, how to conduct interviews, how to do an advertisement and plan a music program. Businesses gave positive feedback about the leadership skills of youths. Youths themselves gave positive feedback about their acquisition of confidence, organisational and time management skills.
4. *Demonstrate/apply greater understanding, skills, capacity:* Youths applied their skills in an action learning context on such projects as running a fashion show, a local bands concert, a youth radio program. There were some examples of how the project has encouraged youth to stay in the community through clarifying their career path choices.
5. *Family and community trust/resilience/adaptability:* The newspaper that youths produced enabled them to present themselves positively and their writings was helping to break down barriers with the older generation. Some specific examples were provided of breaking down generational, socio-economic and, to a lesser extent, cultural barriers. There was some evidence of additional limited preparedness amongst adults to have youth involved in decision-making.
6. *Environment where communities participate in and drive their own solutions:* Youths directed and ran all aspects of a Youth Summit that led to multiple outcomes e.g. a project to do a feasibility study on a youth concession card, the formation of a National Youth Advisory Board; one site ran a National Film Festival; each site agreed to run a youth summit in their respective area, to collate results and present at a combined summit to community / business leaders and politicians
7. *Stronger families and communities – improved wellbeing:* Some examples were provided of youth receiving payments for the work they were doing on projects. The fact that some youth had elected to stay in the areas as a result of their experience may strengthen these communities or help to arrest their decline.

Box 10:

A project that is developing several types of capital

This project in WA mapped existing community assets and strengths, conducts community visioning and planning sessions and develops strategies for mobilising these assets and strengths to achieve the community's vision to be stronger. The project used (and trialled) a methodology that had not been used in Australia before but drawing on literature from the USA.

1. *Participation, networking, trust, new ideas:* Attendance rates at steering committee meetings were consistently good. (Note: This is noteworthy because problems with maintaining interest of participants have beset many of the other projects reviewed as part of this paper). Diversity of membership of the steering committee had enabled the project to tap into many networks to distribute information and encourage participation.
2. *Greater awareness, partnership development:* Greater awareness had resulted from the asset identification process (social and institutional, human, economic and physical assets). Informal and formal collaborative working relationships had been developed between agencies, business and community members. The project report provided a list of the types of activities undertaken.
3. *Greater choice, understanding, skills, capacity for initiative:* Greater choice had arisen through the documentation of community assets as a 'people bank' which became available as a community resource. There was some evidence of skills development through the project e.g. people who spoke very little at initial meetings due to their comfort levels began to undertake presentations on behalf of the project to complete strangers.
4. *Demonstrate/apply greater understanding, skills, capacity:* Asset information had been used to identify 'asset mobilisation projects'. The information had also been used to provide useful assistance and advice to the community. For example the project had improved relationships with the main shopping centre and had provided it with information about people's ideas about how it should be developed. The Centre had acted on some of these ideas.
5. *Family and community trust/resilience/adaptability:* Improved civic pride was developing through the use of a range of strategies. These include working with local media to encourage positive reporting, profiling residents that were doing great things, developing a hall of fame of successful people that grew up in the area, bumper stickers, promoting the project outside the area.
6. *Environment where communities participate in and drive their own solutions:* This was occurring through the community visioning and planning process. The community was mobilising assets that had been identified in order to achieve the vision and was identifying funding sources for asset mobilisation. Asset mobilisation projects were planned, underway or completed. Examples include: community forums, school holiday pass, a community calendar, Community Spring Clean, Parks and Recreational facilities improvement projects, busking and other community events. A marketing strategy for the community had also been developed.
7. *Stronger families and communities – improved wellbeing:* This was expected to occur through the asset mobilisation projects and continuing identification of further assets and strengthening of networks and partnerships to serve the community.

3 Processes for planning the development, use and sustainability of community capacity

Smith and Davies (2001) identified a sequence of questions that a community would need to answer as part of planning a community capacity building strategy. They start with the identification of an issue to be addressed by community capacity and move sequentially through to the identification of processes to support or diminish capacity that has been developed.

Not all capacity building projects adopt an issues based approach to capacity building. So to broaden the usefulness of Smith and Davies' questions we are treating them as planning processes that can be undertaken by communities but not necessarily in a particular order or covering all processes. Later we discuss the merits of approaching these various processes with and without an issues-focus and whether the processes should occur in a particular sequence.

The processes described in Box 11 draw heavily on the questions posed by Smith and Davies but they have been adapted to reflect Strategy principles such as a focus on strengths rather than on deficits. We use these processes as a framework for reviewing some approaches used by projects to plan and undertake community capacity building.

If we were to develop an outcomes hierarchy from the processes for planning community capacity building as shown in Box 11, it might look something like Figure 2 which follows Box 11 in this paper.

Using the Outcomes Hierarchy for Community Capacity Building (Figure 2) to identify what outcomes a particular project needs to achieve.

In principle, a community could enter the hierarchy in Figure 2 at any point from box 1 to box 6. The feedback loop from box 6 to box 1 shows that capacity building is not a once-off exercise but rather a cyclical or spiralling process. If it is working well it will have ever-widening application and / or sophistication.

Not all communities will achieve or need to achieve all outcomes shown in Figure 2. For example some communities may be able to simply make better use of existing capacity, bypassing the need to develop additional capacity. The direct arrows from box 1 to box 5 and from box 3 to box 5 would apply to such communities.

The feedback arrow from box 5 to box 3 in Figure 2 shows that communities may, in the course of undertaking a project, identify what further capacity is required or needs to be accessed.

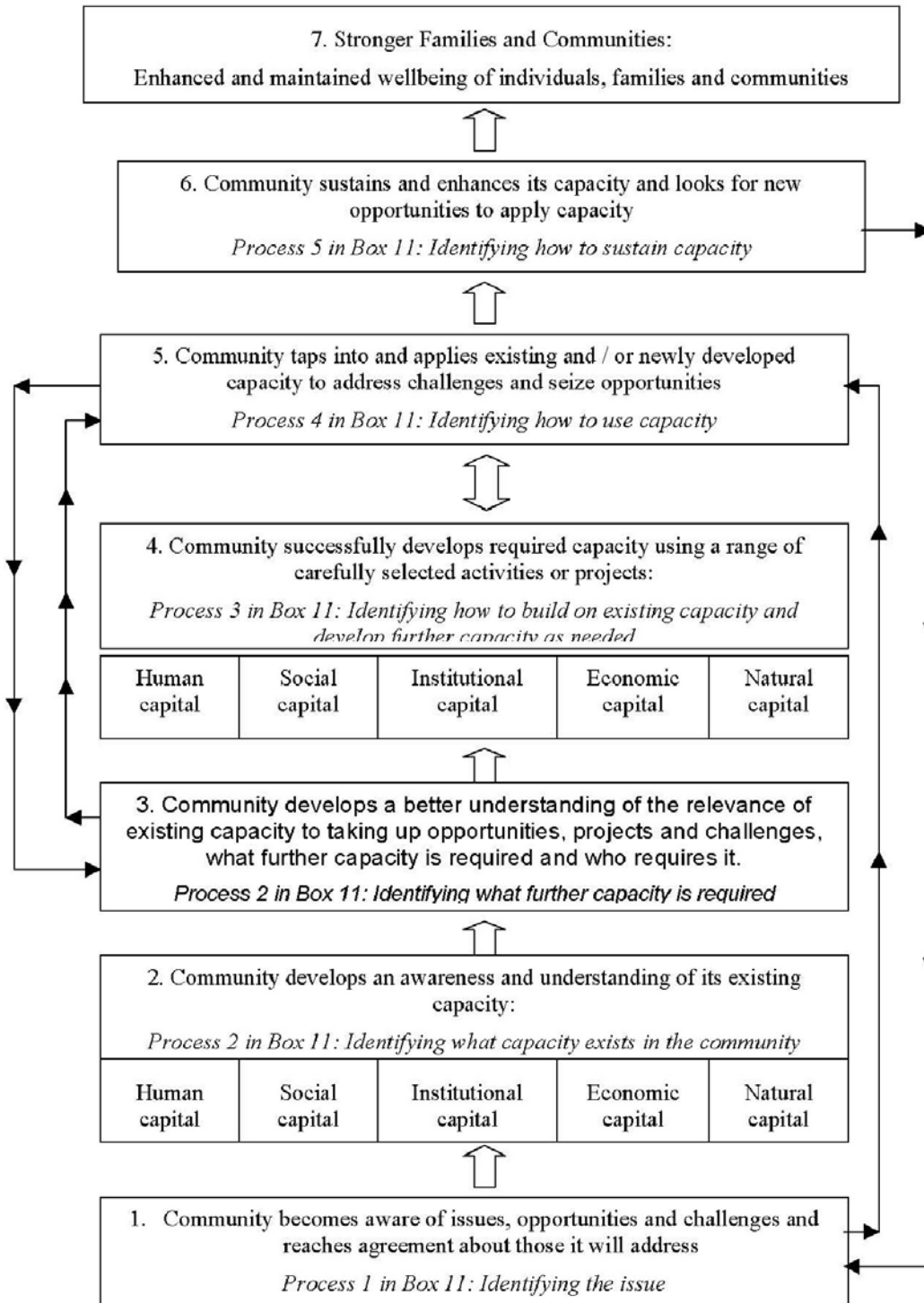
Indeed some projects may start at box 5 (i.e. immediately start work on a project) and then find that they need to more systematically identify other sources of capacity or to develop further capacity. They may, having started a project, sometimes put the 'main project' on hold in order to develop the capacity that they have found they need.

Box 11: Processes for planning capacity building

The sequence of questions is as follows:

1. *What is the issue that the community would like to address or the opportunity that it would like to grasp?* Examples of issues might include lack of opportunities for women in the community to network, youth leaving the community in significant numbers, opportunities associated with the development of new industries.
2. *What capacity currently exists within the community? Which element(s) of capacity need(s) to be created or enhanced? Who or what needs to have capacity to act in relation to those issues or opportunities?* For example, which aspects of human, social, institutional and/or economic capacity are already available and which need to be developed? Is it individuals, families, organisations and/or communities of interest that require capacity?
3. *What can the community do to build on existing capacity within the community and address any gaps in capacity?* e.g. what leadership development opportunities are available? What opportunities are there to bring together different sources of expertise and networks? What types of projects or activities could the community usefully undertake to develop capacity (e.g. mentoring, developing networks, introducing new project management processes or new facilities, setting up finance schemes)?
4. *How can the community capitalise on new or increased capacity to address its particular issues and/or opportunities?* How will this new capacity contribute to the development and implementation of a local solution to the particular local problem? People with the new capacity need to have the practical opportunity to use their skills in developing and implementing practical solutions to the identified issue.
5. *What processes are needed to support or diminish this new, enhanced and/or existing capacity? Do they exist? What more needs to be done?* This relates to the processes or programs that exist within the community or are external to the community that can have an impact on the sustainability of the new or existing community capacity. Do people in the community have ongoing opportunities to maintain, build on and apply capacity? Do governance processes and structures in each community support capacity building and its retention? Do they encourage self-reliance or dependency?

Figure 1: Outcomes Hierarchy for Community Capacity Building projects



Process 1: Identifying the community's issue

Our review of projects for this paper suggests that identifying an issue that the community wishes to address or an opportunity that the community could grasp can provide a practical focus for capacity building. It can lead to 'runs on the board', a sense of achievement, a cause for celebration and a platform from which to move onto other achievements and/or other projects.

Some project examples that incorporate issue identification as a basis for an applied orientation to capacity building are included in Box 12. In our discussion of issue 3, we explore what happens when projects do not focus on a particular issue.

Box 12: Examples of projects that identified specific issues as a basis for community capacity building

The Regional Community Renewal Scheme focused on identifying and developing skills required for projects that would provide paid employment to Social Housing Tenants and skills required to tender for those projects e.g. housing maintenance projects. This project had been able to generate and maintain enthusiasm and action and was producing some outcomes across all seven levels of the outcomes framework.

A youth project that involved them in real life project work within a business organisation, receiving on the job training and working as part of a management team. The project worked with young potential leaders. This project had also been able to generate enthusiasm and action and was producing outcomes across all seven levels of the outcomes framework.

Process 2: Identifying what types of capacity currently exist, what are needed

In principle this process can be split into two processes: identifying what currently exists and identifying what is needed.

Figure 2 shows this split. However in practice it appears that many communities undertake the two processes hand in hand. Accordingly in the interests of brevity we have combined the two.

Smith and Davies add a further separate process, namely identifying who or what needs capacity. For the purpose of this paper, we have rolled this process into process 2.

Capacity building can be a resource intensive, energy intensive and time consuming process. It is therefore important that communities make systematic and appropriate decisions about what capacity to develop and how to go about doing it.

There are many different ways that communities can and do go about deciding which aspects of community capacity they should strive to develop. In simple terms some approaches are oriented to starting with the strengths of a community and building on those strengths whereas other approaches tend to be more oriented to identifying deficits (e.g. relative to 'ideals' or 'wish lists').

In practice, most communities are probably using some combination of the assets and deficits approaches. Much of the difference in orientation is reflected in whether the 'starting capacity' of a community is presented as a 'glass half full or half empty'.

In this section we consider a key Strategy principle, namely the application of strengths-based approaches, and how that principle is being played out as part of capacity building in funded Strategy projects.

A strengths-based approach is seen as having more potential to generate optimism and a 'can do' mentality. It may also provide a more realistic foundation for developing capacity. A deficit approach is somewhat more open-ended and may lead to an unprocurable wish list.

Nevertheless, the project co-ordinator for one project, commented that selling the concept of strengths-based approaches to the community is both important and difficult for those who are used to applying a deficit mind set.

The literature on capacity building reinforces the Strategy principles of strengths-based approaches and community ownership and control as fundamental to capacity building. For example, Chapman and Kirk (2001, p4) comment that:

Regeneration professionals often believe that providing training and capacity building will automatically strengthen community participation. However, such an approach often neglects the wealth of knowledge, skills and expertise that already exists in the community. This expertise needs to be 'tapped' and utilised in a constructive way. Over the long term, community capacity building is a process that seeks to ensure that communities gain influence, control and ownership over the regeneration processes.

Chapman and Kirk (2001) also draw attention to the need for local training needs analysis before embarking on a training program. They comment that the process should take stock of both existing capacity within the community and gaps in skills and knowledge of both individuals and groups as a whole.

Chapman and Kirk's comments reflect a view that it is important to look at both strengths and deficits. A singular focus on strengths, while confidence boosting, could narrow the horizons of the community to that which it sees as within its current reach. It could cause the community to become complacent and lead to a lack of interest in developing new strengths to offset current deficits.

How Strategy projects have identified aspects of community capacity to be developed

Drawing on the projects reviewed for this paper, it is apparent that projects are using a wide variety of approaches to identify the aspects of community capacity that will be the focus for development in a given community. Some are clearly strengths-based approaches and others are more about perceived needs.

Community Capacity Building

Approaches used by the projects include:

- skills audits and inventories;
- asset mapping;
- identification of community issues and 'needs' assessments – what the community wants and/or wants improved.

Different data collection methods and consultative processes are used to undertake these assessments including:

- surveys, checklists and 'strengths cards';
- focus groups;
- community meetings;
- interviews;
- review of asset registers;
- comparisons with 'best practice'; and
- collection of data about the community (e.g. demographic, social and economic indicators).

Some of the assessments are general assessments of available assets. Other asset assessments are tied to particular projects i.e. what assets are available that are relevant to the project in question and what further development is needed.

Box 13 shows examples of the projects using various approaches to identify strengths and assess needs.

Box 13: Examples of approaches used to identify strengths and assess needs

A project had conducted a survey of practices of volunteer organisations and compared these practices with 'best practices' as a basis for determining training needs.

Another interviewed CEOs of emergency relief organisations asking them to describe their needs, the issues that arise from untrained staff dealing with clients and how they address those training needs and issues.

A Community Renewal project identified skills needed to participate in fixed special projects of the Department of Housing. It then developed an inventory of skills in the community to enable matches to be made and further training etc to be given where gaps appeared.

A variety of different approaches were used for a project to identify existing skills with a view to establishing programs for acquiring new skills and developing pathways for using those skills in the caravan parks and wider community. Methods used to assess skills included:

- discussions.
- a formal capacity inventory which asked them to tick skills/abilities that:
 - a) they had,
 - b) would like to teach, or
 - c) would like to learn;
- an Abilities Skills Kindness Scheme survey which asked them to tick everyday tasks they could do themselves, could help others with or with which they needed help themselves.

A program concentrating on learning partnerships undertook an asset mapping exercise with members of the community leaders group. The working group documented individual skills and resources and prepared resource inventories, a community resource catalogue and mentor registers.

A rural development program identified training needs for generating community capability by undertaking a series of community co-ordinator and volunteer meetings in six communities with 20 or more people attending each meeting. The Co-ordinator then prepared a report on the identified training needs for the Shire.

A project aimed at young people had them conducting surveys and interviews of individuals and businesses concerning their perceptions of the community and its future. They launched a video of the process and identified four common themes and from there moved on to identify more than 100 ideas for potential business enterprises. The themes were both positive and negative i.e. focused both on strengths and deficits.

A local community employed a facilitator to collect data about the community, engage in consultations with the community and prepare a strategic plan for addressing issues identified as important. Consultation with the community was through 6 focus groups each directed to a different segment of the population: children, young people, parents, Aboriginal people, culturally and linguistically diverse people and service providers. A total of 66 people participated and issues were identified that were classified into 8 areas. These provided a structure for the strategic plan.

How do communities identify who or what needs capacity?

Projects that are undertaking assessments of community assets may wish to work on several different fronts or with very specific groups or individuals within the community. An example of a project that was undertaking asset mapping of the whole community is shown in Box 14.

Box 14: Asset mapping of a whole community

A community project mapped the following:

- individual skills and talents;
- associations and community networks;
- institutions and professional entities;
- economic assets;
- physical assets (land and buildings).

using surveys (some completed as face to face interviews) for the first four types of assets and an asset register for the last.

Sometimes it can be helpful to systematically identify who or what needs capacity. Timing of decisions about whose capacity should be developed can be difficult.

For example, communities may find they need to make decisions early on as to whether they will work with individuals, groups, or organisations. They may have to make these decisions even though they have only partial information about which particular individuals and organisations currently have which types of capacity and lack others.

The review of projects indicated that some were indeed wrestling with questions such as :

- whether capacity building needed to be directed to individuals and/or groups and if so which ones;
- if particular attention were given to developing the capacity of individuals, whether there would be a focus on leadership development or some other approach;
- if so, how leaders or potential leaders would be identified.

Amongst the projects that we reviewed, some chose to work with existing established leaders. This made it relatively easy for those leaders to step straight into addressing issues that they were confronting on a regular basis. Other projects identified potential leaders or leadership groups whose future issues (and even whose future as leaders) might not have been so readily apparent. Box 15 gives examples of both approaches.

Box 15: Working with existing or potential leaders

A project that worked with existing leaders

A resident leadership project provided training courses for existing leaders of groups in local communities. They commented that one of their reasons for doing so was that leadership tends to be exercised at local community levels by groups rather than at regional levels by individuals.

A project that worked with a combination of existing and potential leaders

A project concentrating on learning partnerships brought together a group of current community leaders who knew their community well to identify projects of concern to the community, identify emerging leaders and work in a mentoring role with those emerging leaders in groups of 4 or 5.

Projects that worked with potential leaders

As part of a mentoring program potential young leaders were identified through a two step process. The first step identified a large pool of potential leaders which using a variety of processes (e.g. telephone contacts with the Department of Community Services, promotional events and sports camps). The second step involved screening within the pool, inviting those selected to participate and then matching those who accepted the offer with mentors.

An initiative concentrating on micro-finance schemes for those on low incomes resulted in the identification of potential leaders as an outcome of the project and this laid the foundation for the next stages of the project.

The project descriptions and reports of leadership projects did not always make it clear how leaders and potential leaders had been identified or, in the words of one project, 'ear marked' and whether those so identified would necessarily be regarded by their communities as leaders or potential leaders.

A few projects commented that the concept of leadership is foreign to some communities. It may be offensive or elitist to some community members and unpalatable to some who have been so 'earmarked'. Some reported that they did not wish to see themselves as leaders – they just wanted to make a difference in their community.

Therefore projects need to be careful about how they present the purpose and process of developing skills of individuals. At the same time, projects do wish to imbue these individuals with a sense of purpose and an expectation that they will play a continuing role.

Implementation issues in assessing existing capacity and identifying what capacity is required

Determining what aspects of capacity need to be addressed would appear to be as much a political issue as a technical one.

For example, one project found that, even though it used systematic empirical and analytic processes to identify training needs, it was imperative that organisations have a close involvement in the development and running of the programs. The project report also commented that it can be difficult to build the capacity of organisations that have a long history of doing it their own way.

Not all communities will be willing to participate in the types of needs assessment and decision making processes that projects propose. One City Council used resource inventories for asset mapping purposes but found that the completion rates in some communities was poor.

The project co-ordinator for another project prepared skills audits documents and distributed these at a community meeting. The documents included:

- Why community skills auditing?;
- Mature individual skills audit;
- Organisational skills audit.

However, attendees at the community workshop were not convinced of the usefulness of doing a skills audit.

Moreover different segments of the community may be more favourably disposed to asset assessment processes.

For example, one project used surveys for asset mapping in relation to individual skills and talents, associations and community networks, institutions and professional entities and economic assets. Response rates were good for residents and consumers (95% and 100% respectively) barely moderate for associations and networks (39%) and very poor for businesses (4%).

The project co-ordinator for this project commented on the importance of ensuring confidentiality of information obtained through asset assessments. Another also reported that privacy issues had become a concern during the asset mapping exercise.

It is possible that some businesses would consider such information, if made public, to be a threat to their competitive edge. However, the observation concerning confidentiality applies not just to businesses but also to individuals.

Some individuals would consider the information to be highly personal. Others are concerned that asset registers on which they are listed could result in them being over-used by the community e.g. some Indigenous individuals are forever being asked to represent their community.

Face to face contact and engagement in administering the survey was found to be helpful in one instance, and this approach was used with many participants in the asset assessment process.

Ease of implementation of needs assessments varies with context and nature of the community. For example one project found that training needs assessments can be difficult to implement in large hierarchical organisations in which staff and volunteers work from many different sites on different types of issues.

Asset and needs assessment as a contributor to community confidence

Undertaking various forms of assessment of existing community capacity can itself be a community strengthening process. It can contribute to outcomes 3 and 5 of the Strategy outcomes framework (see Figure 1). Outcome 3 incorporates aspects of enhanced confidence and outcome 5 relates to enhanced resilience that can arise from a sense of 'can do'.

To illustrate: it was reported in one project, that residents had commented that undertaking the various skills assessment processes:

- reminded them of good memories of good times in their life;
- initiated discussions that continued outside of the meetings;
- helped build relationships and trust;
- increased belief in self and others.

The co-ordinator reported that use of the capacity inventory proved useful as a means of engagement and promoted a view within the community that skills and interest exist among residents.

Nevertheless this project reported that there remained many barriers to residents undertaking joint projects on the back of inventories. These include some features that the project reported as being particular to caravan park communities namely, issues around tenancy, mobility, privacy, level of disadvantage and safety concerns.

Such issues can also bind tenants through common concerns. In the light of experience of other projects that we reviewed for this paper, we suggest that these issues that caravan park residents confront on a daily basis may have been a more attractive starting point for the skills assessment process than the development of a general purpose inventory.

Process 3: Identifying how capacity can be increased.

In our discussion of different types of capital we have already referred to various activities that are undertaken by projects to develop capacity. The prevalence of use of these activities and specific examples are being explored through the questionnaires that are to be completed by all projects. Activities listed in those questionnaires include:

Community Capacity Building

- Mentoring;
- Training;
- Counselling and other assistance;
- Action research;
- Formation of networks and linkages;
- Community consultations;
- Bring community members together;
- Significant community/cultural events;
- Distributing facilities/resources;
- Assistance to participate in other activities.

Some, but by no means all, projects that we reviewed, provided a rationale for the particular method they were using to develop capacity. We therefore have little that we can report about the processes used to choose particular activities. Some rare examples of rationale for choice include the following:

- Provider knowledge of the differences in context of the various organizations was used by one project to determine format, location, cost and level of training required. Demographic analyses relating to volunteers were used to determine the level at which training should be pitched.
- Other projects cautioned that even when a community (or groups or individuals within a community) identifies what types of capacity they would like to have developed they do not always grasp the opportunities to do so. Asking communities what they need is no guarantee that they will respond to attempts to address that need.
- For example, a community was asked to identify areas in which members would like upskilling. Following an initial interest in computer upskilling the co-ordinator gained access to free computer lessons at various levels but community members did not take up the offer of the lessons.
- One leadership project provided training courses for existing leaders. The courses appear to have included some general capacity building but some of the courses included local project components e.g. working on redevelopment issues with residents and the Department of Housing. This project explained why four local programs were run in preference to one big regional program. In part, this was to ensure a more locally relevant and applied approach to capacity building. The project report commented that:
 - leadership tends to be exercised at local community levels by groups rather than at regional levels by individuals;
 - participants don't need to be immersed because they are already immersed in the local situation;
 - leadership capacities are more likely to be developed through interactive workshops (which presumably are easier to conduct on a smaller groups of people sharing similar local issues).

Process 4: Planning how to apply new and existing capacity to address community issues and opportunities

Process 4 in Box 11 is about identifying how the community will apply capacity. Planning for the application of capacity is important if projects and their communities are to move beyond the lower levels of outcome in the Strategy outcomes framework as shown in Figure 1 and from developing capacity to applying capacity to strengthen communities as shown in Figure 2.

Several authors point to the importance of the nexus between capacity and opportunity to apply capacity as an essential ingredient of stronger communities (e.g. Smith and Herbert, 1997, 6-8). Not only must capacity be available but there must be opportunities to apply the capacity. Conversely, the emergence of opportunities can be a catalyst for both identifying and developing existing and required capacity.

As noted in this report, several projects are conducting asset assessments. From these asset assessments some communities have developed asset registers. These registers are developed to map and communicate what capacity is currently available with a view to making it more accessible for particular projects or for more general use by the community as opportunities arise.

However, there was not much discussion in the project reports concerning whether members of the community have actually accessed the register as opportunities have arisen. Some projects have more deliberately sought links between asset registers (or their equivalent) and potential opportunities.

For example, a project having identified the services provided by various organisations, had begun to draw organisations together to establish a soup kitchen for disadvantaged and homeless people co-ordinated by the Salvation Army with assistance from other service providers.

Opportunities include not just potential projects and activities but also the resources to undertake them and genuine autonomy of choice. Jupp, (2000 p44) states:

Real capacity building involves giving groups the independence to manage resources. Not just training them in how to work on committees. Training is often helpful, but it is not sufficient in its own right.

Stuart-Weeks (1998) also draws attention to the fact that giving communities independence to manage resources is an important aspect of enabling communities to manage for outcomes. He also comments that government processes generally stop short of redistributing and surrendering control over resources. He comments that the extent to which a community can truly manage in order to achieve the outcomes that it identifies as important is determined by a combination of three factors:

- The *locus of responsibility to make decisions* and set the policy or outcome framework;

- The degree to which the *money and other resource decisions* that affect the community are taken by authorities within that community⁶;
- The nature of the framework within which *accountability for results* is applied.

Process 5: Supporting and sustaining capacity

Part of supporting and sustaining capacity involves identifying how to build on it. At a very practical level, many of the projects that we reviewed were thinking about their next steps and putting plans in place to build on and sustain capacity. These included working with different target groups, changing approach (either dramatically or in terms of emphasis and additional or changed activities), building on what had been accomplished.

Some examples follow of projects that had determined their next steps and new activities for the future on the basis of what they had learnt from their Strategy project experience:

Working with different target groups

- One training and development project found that Indigenous workers expressed frustration about not having appropriate resources developed for their specific needs and had expressed a need for more training to deal with particular cultural issues within their communities. They were continuing consultations with Indigenous communities to identify specific training needs.
- Another, working with young people identified opportunities to establish the project in other areas, with specific target groups e.g. people with disabilities, young people at risk, Indigenous young people and to work with families of young people to strengthen relationships.

Change of approach and/or additional activities

- A community renewal project had determined that employment co-operatives would be a better means of achieving their objectives and the community had taken steps to establish such co-operatives. An employment plan for the next 3 to 5 years has been developed.
- Another planned to place more focus on increasing the number of partly or fully self-funded youth run projects in each of its sites.

⁶ Because Stuart-Weeks paper is about 'Place management' he actually refers to decisions that affect the place being made by the place authority rather than the community.

Building on what has been developed

- A program concentrating on rural development planned to develop further training modules based on what they had learnt from experience with the first modules.
- An initial one-off conference planned to become an annual event to build on the networking and information sharing that was underway. In future the conferences would be hosted by local communities.

Planning to sustain existing capacity is also an important part of planning a capacity building project. Questions around sustainability include:

- whether failure to mobilise that capacity may lead to erosion of capacity through non-use.
- if so, how long will it take before that erosion occurs? How much reinforcement is needed?
- in the light of the above, what is the ideal temporal relationship between building capacity and applying it to strengthen a community? Contemporaneous? Sequential?
- what about when development of human capacity leads to people moving out of their community? i.e. they use it as a stepping stone to better things for themselves?
- how do communities cope with movement out of the community of those whose capacity has been developed through Strategy projects? For example do they have succession planning processes in place?
- what can projects and their facilitators/co-ordinators do to increase the independence of communities and ensure that their capacity is minimally dependent on the facilitator/co-ordinator?

In relation to erosion of capacity and keeping capacity current, it would appear that maintenance activities will be important.

To illustrate: for those projects that have developed asset registers it would be important to identify how the asset register will be managed on an ongoing basis (e.g. kept current, processes for access and for information security as needed). There was little evidence in the project reports that consideration had been given to how to maintain asset registers. However, the absence of evidence does not necessarily mean that no steps were being taken, simply that they were not reported.

Sustainability would also appear to be affected by the processes used during a project and not just what will be undertaken after the project is completed. Many projects use all or part of Strategy funds to employ a project co-ordinator/facilitator and in some cases it seems doubtful whether, without that person, the projects would succeed. It seems likely that for some communities there will always be a need for some paid assistance to co-ordinate, maintain momentum, ensure that new people with fresh ideas and capacity replace those that leave.

Several Strategy projects have funded facilitators to undertake strategic planning for a community. For example a strategic plan was produced for a city council in consultation with the community, using focus groups. It may be difficult to secure community ownership of a project like this one. It will be interesting to see how the Council responds to the plan and whether the community implements it.

The ways in which a project facilitator/co-ordinator exercises her/his role will also have a bearing on the degree of dependence of the community on the facilitator once project funding ceases. One aspect concerns the extent to which the facilitator deliberately fosters institutional development.

Another aspect relates to the role of the co-ordinator and how that role is perceived by the community. Several of the facilitator/co-ordinators commented that they saw their role as one of guidance rather than direction and doing. However the community did not always see the role of the facilitator in these terms. Examples relating to the role of the facilitator appear in Box 16.

Box 16: The role of the facilitator

One community-focussed project reported that the community appeared to be happy contributing and working with a co-ordinator. The slower than expected response from the community may have reflected concerns implied by such comments as:

- How long are we going to have you for?
- Why should we bother doing all this stuff if you aren't hanging around?

During the project, the preference had been for the co-ordinator to initiate and organise meetings and then for the community to participate. The co-ordinator hoped this would evolve into the community picking up the responsibility but noted that many of the community members had paid employment as well as being actively involved in the community and this would constrain how actively they could become involved.

Another, commented that facilitators need to make it clear at the beginning of their relationship with a community group that their role is more as a catalyst than a carer and that this requires clarity of role and of boundaries

A further project working with youth was one in which the Manager saw her/his role as that of coach, providing constant support throughout the project but stepping back from doing the work or taking charge. In some cases that meant letting the youths fail and learn from failure. The project report provided several examples of use of this approach.

This has implications for the sustainability of the projects. During the projects, it was clear that turnover of key individuals at vulnerable stages of the project caused some projects to lose ground. Loss of a facilitator at the 'completion' of some projects could also cause the development and application of capacity to lose momentum.

The loss of a facilitator or project co-ordinator may be less of an issue for those projects that had a highly specific and time limited task such as the development of an educational resource. However, even such resources may need an extra push by an interested person to ensure that the resource is used by the community and doesn't languish on a shelf. Project planning will need to ensure that follow-through processes are in place.

Most projects also have working groups and/or steering committees drawn from the community and most are generating some commitment and capacity amongst members that should help with the sustainability of the pursuit of community capacity building goals. However it is hard to know whether they will be able to sustain the momentum. Movement of people in and out of the community and in and out of the project can clearly erode some of the capacity built up. This applies equally to paid workers and to volunteers.

In relation to paid employees, one program referred to difficulties created for local projects by loss of skilled workers to higher salaries and broader opportunities in the metropolitan areas. This project further commented that engaging the community and not just paid workers takes a considerable amount of time.

Some projects and their communities have recognised that issues of sustainability need to be addressed and have begun to do so (see Box 17). For example, some projects have taken steps to facilitate succession planning in committees and other groups. There is also some evidence of community members starting to take responsibility for tasks and projects about which they had previously lacked confidence (e.g. running workshops, conferences, mentoring programs).

Box 17: How projects address issues of succession planning and ongoing management by the community

A youth-oriented project identified that loss of members of the Youth Advisory Boards to go to tertiary studies had alerted the project to the need to have a range of ages on the Boards for succession planning and to ensure that all members do not leave at once. The project had had some success with this strategy but was continuing to work on the issue.

A skills development program for services that use volunteers and for the volunteers themselves, commented that evidence was not yet available about the retention rates of volunteers that had received training and therefore the sustainability of capacity by the volunteer organisations. It commented that the evidence from some other programs was that some volunteers may use training as an entrance to TAFE or to enhance employment opportunities and therefore be lost to the volunteer organisations.

Projects like this one, that have dual objectives of improving the employment prospects of individuals and enhancing the capacity of organisations, can expect this to be a particularly vexed issue. To address the dilemma and also for reasons of efficiency, this project had tried to use train the trainer models but had had difficulty in generating enough confidence amongst volunteers to train other volunteers.

A youth mentoring project reported that self-sustaining development committees were established in the two areas of the project. The committees had reported they were happy with the way the programs were developing in their areas – they were pleased with the quality of the program and the quality of the relationships that were being established with young people. Each location was autonomous and had a plan for their area to promote growth and expansion. Senior mentors were identified by the community to continue the development and delivery of the mentoring program. The co-ordinator had then stepped back and taken on the role of advisor.

Sustainability can be a substantial issue for projects that are heavily dependent on supply of financial assistance to individuals or families (e.g. through subsidisation and discounts to participants) to shore up capacity.

For example, an initiative which establishes micro-finance schemes for those on low incomes reported that it is important for such schemes to have a low default rate. Strategies to encourage low default such as automatic deductions through Centrepay incur transaction costs for borrowers. The project had not been passing on those costs to borrowers but it commented that this practice would not be sustainable in the long term and that discussions were underway with Centrepay to see what could be done.

In summary, sustainability needs to be considered as early as possible in the life of a project and needs to include next steps to build on capacity, maintaining existing capacity, accessing continuing support including support of interested individuals and resources.

4 Issue 3: General versus issue-specific capacity building

The coalescence of capacity and opportunity (see discussion of process 4 in Box 11), as a key factor for strengthening a community, raises further questions about:

- whether Community capacity can exist as a free standing 'commodity' ready to be brought into action when the time and opportunity is right or;
- whether it is something that is situation specific, constructed and mobilised in response to a particular need, issue, problem and is therefore relative to that need and applied in the course of addressing that need ;
- whether all capacity building projects should be conducted around an issue that the community needs to address or whether there is also a place for non-issue specific capacity building (e.g. general training).

In simple terms, alternative ways of using and sequencing the various processes of capacity building can be described as follows:

- identifying an issue to work on and developing capacity as part of working on that issue;
- identifying existing capacity with a view to then identifying issues or opportunities to which the capacity could be applied;
- developing capacity with no direct connection to particular issues.

In our discussion of issue 2 we addressed several processes that are involved in development and application capacity. Smith and Davies (2001) presentation of those processes presents them as a series of steps, each leading to the next. The proposed processes have an applied flavour. They focus on ensuring that capacity that is developed will be used to the benefit of the community.

4.1 Identifying an issue to work on and developing capacity as part of working on that issue

There were several examples amongst the projects we reviewed that highlighted the importance of focusing on an issue and learning in an applied context. In practice, communities sometimes adopt different strategies for working through those processes:

- some follow the processes in the sequence in which we and Smith and Davies have presented them;
- some tackle an issue without identifying whether they have the capacity to do so;
- others identify capacity and then see what issues they could address or opportunities they could find that might enable them to draw on that capacity;

- others decide what capacity they wish to develop without reference to a particular issue.

Our earlier discussion of Figure 2 (the outcomes hierarchy for community capacity building) also suggested that some communities may with good reason skip a level in the outcomes hierarchy. The hierarchy could also be portrayed as a cycle that communities could, in principle, enter at any point.

Capacity building around an issue can be:

- systematic and deliberate involving the specific identification of particular skills etc required to address an issue or task; and/or
- a byproduct of working on a particular issue.

One renewal scheme, and to a lesser extent another youth-oriented project (See Box 12) are examples of the former. Projects that undertake such a systematic approach to identifying and developing certain types of capacity may, of course, also develop other types of capacity as a by-product and it is not always possible to anticipate what types of capacity will be developed.

An example of unanticipated capacity building was that reported for participants in the renewal scheme. In addition to developing project specific skills and winning tenders, participants had also identified additional areas in which they would like to develop particular employment related accredited training and had started to seek out that training.

Sometimes a focus on an issue as the first step can be to the detriment of capacity building. There are situations in which projects can be so focused on addressing a particularly pressing issue or crisis that they overlook the fact that capacity will be required to address that issue.

From our discussions with State and Territory Officers, there were examples of projects that rushed into the project implementation stage, keen to tackle issues of daily concern, without adequate preparation. The process of doing so taught them the benefit of taking more time and developing more project design and implementation skills. In some cases they saw themselves as taking one step forward and two steps back but the two steps back took them to a firmer foundation for future projects.

Identifying the appropriate rate of progress is one that requires balancing the need for runs on the board against the need to establish firm foundations for further development. With respect to the latter, some projects stressed that community capacity building is a long-term process and some reported that it was taking longer than they expected.

4.2 Identifying capacity with a view to then identifying issues or opportunities to which the capacity could be applied

The extent to which processes of identifying and developing capacity need to be tied to particular issues in order to maintain community interest may vary depending upon the starting position of a community (e.g. in terms of existing levels of trust, past experience in working together, enthusiasm).

It is therefore important when undertaking such a capacity mapping exercise to identify a community's readiness to do so. Readiness will have attitudinal, experiential and skill components.

Box 18 shows two contrasting examples of projects that focused on identifying existing capacity (strengths-based approaches) with a view to then identifying issues or opportunities to which the capacity could be applied.

Box 18: Contrasting examples of projects that identified capacity with a view to then seeing how capacity could be applied

A community leadership strategy endeavoured to engage residents in a process of identifying existing skills (process 2 in Box 10) It would appear that no particular issues were identified as the focus for identifying skills (process 1).

This project was operating in a highly disadvantaged and crisis ridden community (namely caravan parks).

It had experienced considerable difficulty in maintaining the active involvement of residents in leadership and capacity building groups. It had also had difficulty in engendering support for the process of identifying existing skills with a view to using those skills in the caravan park.

It may be that the residents did not see sufficient connection between the day to day crises that they were experiencing and the skills that they were being asked to identify. It is also possible that they were simply too stressed and tired to undertake such an exercise.

Another project is functioning in a community in which there appears to have already been considerable interest in raising community profile and pride. Some momentum in undertaking capacity building activities had already been established at the outset of this project.

Members of the community became involved in an asset mapping exercise. The project had the specific intention of then identifying projects through which the community could mobilise those assets.

In addition, many of the community members that had been involved appear to have had the base level of skills needed to undertake the asset mapping process. There were also examples of community members developing skills (e.g. communication skills) through their participation in the asset identification and mobilisation process.

4.3 Developing capacity with no direct connection to particular issues.

There is also a clear place for some general (i.e. not issue specific) capacity building especially when it relates to human and institutional capital. An example would be training that is conducted for volunteers working within organisations. This training may enhance the institutional capacity of those organisations.

At the same time, general development of human capital may also equip volunteers with skills and confidence as they move from one organisation to another and enhance their employment related and general living skills. Other examples would include conferences and general mentoring activities.

However, when development of capacity is not linked to application of that capacity (through addressing community based issues) it can be difficult to tell whether it will be sustained and applied in future. For some projects, such as those providing general training in leadership or some specific skills set, it was too soon to see whether the capacity had been sustained and applied, at the time at which we reviewed these projects.

Amongst the small number of projects that we reviewed that were about general capacity building, there was little information about whether the participants had applied what they learnt or had used their networks.

Some examples of experiences that were reported by projects that provided general (not 'issue specific') training are in Box 19.

Box 19: Experiences of some projects that provided general training or other forms of capacity building not related to specific issues

A skills development program for services that use volunteers and for the volunteers themselves, commented that repeated sessions are necessary to get the message across especially to those with limited experience of volunteering. This seemed to suggest that 'capacity' in the form of human capital can erode very quickly unless it is firmly established.

This project also commented on the fact that high turnover of volunteers means that there will always be a demand for training. Institutional capital can be eroded when volunteers who have been trained leave the organisation.

On a more positive note, another project for volunteers commented that, as a result of training, participants had begun to question their organisations about practices that appeared to be at odds with what they had learnt from their course.

They also reported that training had generated a demand for more training.

Participants saw networking and personal connections with other volunteer organisations, with Centrelink, local financial and gambling counsellors and mental health workers as important outcomes of the training.

A resident training and leadership project reported some success in generating new leaders. This should enhance the sustainability of capacity built.

One of the programs had increased the number of community leaders by working with participants to enable them to support emerging leaders in their own communities. This project was working with participants who were already playing a leadership role and who probably had both more confidence and more opportunity to apply what they were learning.

5 Implications

5.1 Implications of the analysis of different types of capital: human, social, institutional and economic

Implications for the Strategy and for Projects

Some Strategy projects focus on developing and/or using a specific type of capacity. This focus may arise from the interests of proponents whether they be individuals or organisations. While focused on one type of capacity these projects can look for opportunities to concurrently and actively contribute to other types of capacity.

Other capacity building projects take a more strategic whole of community perspective in which they review and build upon many different types of capacity. These projects need to be aware of the range of different types of capacity that contribute to stronger communities.

From the review of projects conducted for this paper, it would appear that projects that directly develop different types of capital or can facilitate linkages to other types of capital will be more effective in securing and maintaining community interest and will produce a richer set of outcomes.

In our review, we found that projects that were working on several different types of capacity also tended to be achieving outcomes at all or most levels of the Strategy outcomes hierarchy, moving closer to contributing to community strength in the sense of improved wellbeing of the community. To some extent this is to be expected because different levels of the hierarchy tend to be more closely associated with different types of capital, but not exclusively.

An implication of our findings is that projects and their communities should be encouraged to look for opportunities to work on a variety of aspects of community capacity and on the interplay and potential synergies amongst those different aspects.

Whether a given project and its community is focused on a small, perhaps time-limited, self-contained project or a more strategic whole of community approach to capacity building, it may find a checklist of the different types of capacity and typical components useful. Such a checklist could sensitise the projects and their communities to opportunities to broaden the scope and impact of their capacity building efforts. A preliminary checklist based on the analysis undertaken for this paper is presented in Box 20.

Implication for the Evaluation

The analysis of the different types of capacity provides a framework for analysing some of the data that are being collected through the evaluation. For example:

- *reported outcomes, no matter which level of the Strategy outcomes hierarchy they occur, can be categorised according to the type of capacity to which they relate.* Classification of outcomes can assist with our comprehension of them when compared with simply having a long undifferentiated list of outcomes. Already, this form of classification has been useful in thinking about some of the outcomes of the community gardens case study and in understanding and commenting on the outcomes of projects reviewed for this paper.
- *differentiation amongst the different aspects of community capacity enables us to ask questions about whether the development of particular types of capacity seem to be more strongly associated with some types of activities than with others.* For example what types of capacity appear to emerge from mentoring projects? Is mentoring and training associated with reported outcomes relating to human capital as one might expect? If not, why not? Is it associated with reported developments in other aspects of capacity? (e.g. social capital or institutional capital)?

Box 20: Overview of components of community capacity: human capital, social capital, economic capital and institutional capital

These are drawn from the various sources cited in this paper. Note that there is some overlap between the categories e.g. human capital may also contribute to institutional capital and vice versa.

<p>Human capital: the capacity of people, through their skills, knowledge and health status, to contribute to the wellbeing of their community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ <i>Skills and knowledge</i> (including subject matter specific knowledge and skills and process skills such as problem solving) □ <i>Capacity to adjust</i> to changing circumstances □ <i>Capacity to innovate</i> and find new solutions □ Ability to contribute through <i>participation</i>; willingness to participate □ <i>Skills in social interaction and decision making</i> □ <i>Health status</i> – physical and mental 	<p>Institutional capital: the capacity of ‘institutions’ (e.g. auspicing organisations) to plan, undertake and sustain or build on activities that can contribute to the wellbeing of the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ <i>Leadership</i> – identification, development and exercise thereof □ <i>Structures and processes</i> including those relating to governance, culture, group work, team building, training, resolving conflict at individual, group or community levels, access to and use of networks, partners and diverse sources of interest and expertise □ <i>Strategic and operational capacity</i> relating to business planning, project design, management, implementation □ <i>Infrastructure, systems and facilities</i>, including information systems.
<p>Social capital: the connections amongst individuals and groups– social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that can contribute to the wellbeing of the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ <i>Types of relationships</i> including whether they involve bonding and/or bridging capital and whether they take place within family and social contexts, civic contexts, not for profit organisations and volunteering contexts, or involve linkages with other types of organisations and expert systems □ <i>Quality of relationships</i> including whether they are characterised by trust, altruism, reciprocity, norms, tolerance and belief in equality of opportunity, a sense of belonging in the community, and self-reliance and self-help. 	<p>Economic capital: the economic resources of the community at all levels that can be accessed to contribute to the wellbeing of the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Economic resources associated with <i>individuals, families and households</i> (that is, income, home ownership) □ Economic resources associated with <i>businesses and other organisations</i> (that is investment in infrastructure) □ <i>Public infrastructure and facilities</i> within a community (that is, hard infrastructure such as roads, social infrastructure such as hospitals and soft infrastructure such as medical professionals).



5.2 Making the links between building capacity and stronger communities

Implications for projects and for the Strategy

Amongst the projects that we reviewed, we found a few that, from their reports, were achieving outcomes at all levels of the Strategy outcomes hierarchy and were therefore more likely to be contributing directly to community wellbeing or to the wellbeing of individuals or some segment of the community. Most projects were achieving outcomes at the lower to middle levels of the Strategy outcomes hierarchy.

Ideally all projects would be moving towards achieving outcomes at the higher levels i.e. contributing to community wellbeing. However, we recognise it will be a long time before some communities, especially those that are just starting out on capacity building, move beyond those lower levels.

For example, some projects will focus on institutional capacity building. For these projects, there may be many degrees of separation between the development of that capacity and a community whose wellbeing is improved⁷. If the process of institutional capacity building becomes an extended one prior to tackling an issue of direct concern to the community then projects would need to take care to ensure that the community maintains interest. Demonstrating relevance in concrete terms may be critical to maintaining community interest and experience.

There may be opportunities for some projects, no matter what their starting point, to lift their sites to take a wider and more long-term perspective on their capacity building efforts. We raise the following questions:

- Should the Strategy be more actively encouraging projects to show how building capacity will strengthen the community and what steps they plan to take to forge the link between community capacity and a stronger community?
- Should projects be encouraged to show how they are moving the community to higher levels of capacity as defined in the outcomes framework?
- More specifically, should the Strategy be more actively encouraging projects that are developing lower levels of capacity (e.g. lower levels in the outcomes framework) to have and to demonstrate that they have a follow-up plan to apply and build on that capacity?

Implications for the evaluation

In order for projects to know whether they are indeed moving up the Strategy hierarchy of outcomes and in order for them to report their outcomes against that hierarchy, they need to have a good understanding of what is intended at each level of the outcomes

⁷ The institutional capacity would need to be applied to the development and then implementation of projects or processes; those projects or processes would need to achieve their specific results and these results may or may not directly contribute to a stronger community.



hierarchy. To this end the level 1 questionnaires contain links to definitions and general explanations.

The examples that have been used in this paper and as background to the paper could be used to provide illustrations of the types of outcomes that might be found at each level of the outcomes hierarchy. These could be incorporated in the advice that goes to projects about how to complete their level 1 questionnaires, supplementing the general explanations that are already available.

5.3 Sequencing the processes for planning and implementing a capacity building project

In our review we found that capacity building projects did not necessarily follow the planning processes as they have been presented, namely:

- identify an issue;
- identify what capacity exists and what needs to be developed;
- identify how to develop capacity;
- identify how to apply the capacity;
- identify how to sustain and enhance the capacity.

Projects sometimes used some processes but not others; they sometimes changed the order in which the processes were conducted. This meant that in terms of intended and actual outcomes they entered at varying points in the outcomes hierarchy that we have prepared for capacity building projects (see Figure 2). Some that entered mid way up the hierarchy then went to a lower level of the hierarchy.

We do not advocate that all projects start at the bottom of the hierarchy and work upwards. They may have already achieved some of the lower levels. They may also deliberately work on higher levels as a means of finding out what they need to do at lower levels. This could be a strategic move to convince the community of the need to build capacity, a move that involves showing, through trying to undertake particular projects, that current capacity is insufficient.

We do, however, suggest that all projects assess their position and their plans in relation to the Capacity Building outcomes hierarchy in Figure 2. They should consider the following questions that relate to the different levels in the outcomes hierarchy:

- How much does the community or project know about what capacity already exists?
- Has the community or the project explored whether and how it can make better use of what currently exists?
- Does the community, while recognising its strengths also recognise areas in which further development of existing capacity or of different types of capacity could widen the opportunities available to the community and/or contribute directly to community wellbeing?



- What approach is the project using to determine what the focus of capacity building or improved access to capacity will be (setting priorities)?
- What approach is the project using to determine what types of activity will develop the required capacity or access current capacity?
- Can the project show that the capacity to be built will be useful in some practical sense and will actually be used to enhance community wellbeing?
- Is the project giving practical consideration to how capacity will be maintained and sustained?

Some of the above questions are also picked up in our discussion of general versus applied capacity building processes.

5.4 General versus issue-specific capacity building processes

In our review we have found that some projects take an applied issues based focus and others do not, taking instead a more general approach to capacity building. There appears to be no single right way of doing things. However, we have concluded that capacity building projects, be they general or specific to an issue, should give active consideration to the way in which capacity will be applied and take steps to foster its application.

Application of capacity is included in the hierarchy of outcomes that constitutes the evaluation framework for the Strategy. The focus on applying capacity and not just on developing capacity should flow through the criteria and processes that projects and the Strategy use to evaluate success.

Amongst the small number of 'general capacity building' projects that we reviewed (e.g. general training for volunteers, conferences), there was little information about whether the participants applied what they learnt or used their networks.

Depending upon how widespread this lack of follow through from development of capacity to its application, there may be a need to encourage projects to give more active consideration to whether there will be opportunities to apply capacity that they have developed. The information that they will be able to provide will have implications for the completeness of the evaluation of the Strategy as a whole.

It would be helpful at the stage of project planning for FaCS to have some indication from projects about how they might follow up on the outcomes of training. Follow-up might attempt to determine the usefulness and of the training, how it had been applied and where future developments might be needed.

Projects and their communities that are undertaking capacity building activities that are general rather than specific to tackling a particular issue could ask themselves the following questions:

- Will the community see the point of developing the capacity? Will it be possible to keep the community interested and involved?
- Has adequate attention been given to whose capacity will be developed taking into consideration their potential to apply capacity in future?



- Has adequate consideration been given to how the capacity will be applied beyond the capacity building project?
- Are there follow through plans to encourage the application of capacity and/or activities with an applied focus built into the capacity building project?
- What will be done to prevent capacity from eroding through non-use, turnover etc.?

These questions could also apply to projects that are developing general asset registers with no particular project or application in mind.

Issues based capacity building is one approach that may help to forge and maintain the nexus between capacity building and stronger communities. However, there are some questions that projects and their communities should consider if there are undertaking capacity building activities that are specific to an issue:

- Will impatience to tackle an issue lead the community to overlook the need to develop some basic general capacity such as institutional capacity before embarking on the project?
- What effect will the need to develop any such general capacity before tackling an issue have on the timeframe and what can be achieved in the timeframe? Are the project's objectives realistic?
- If capacity is developed to address a specific issue, what steps need to be taken to sustain and enhance that capacity and assist with its application to other issues?

The fact that some communities in their impatience to tackle an issue or crisis learn the hard way that they need additional capacity has implications for appropriate timeframes for projects. Timeframes for these communities may need to be longer and there needs to be an acceptance that learning by mistakes is a legitimate and often effective way of learning.

Just as one of the projects working with youth commented that, in order for them to learn, they had to be permitted to do things their own way, make mistakes and learn from them, so also some communities may need to go through that process. It is important that they be permitted to do so without being made to feel they are failing and becoming even more dispirited.

5.5 Processes for identifying what capacity is available and what needs to be developed

We also found that some projects systematically and quite formally assessed current strengths, assets and gaps in capacity while others did not. A wide variety of methods was used to make these assessments. We have given an overview of these methods in this paper.

In the short term, FaCS may wish to consider whether there would be merit in providing information to prospective project proponents concerning the range of different methods used and possibly some contacts to enable them to seek further advice about what has and has not worked in particular circumstances.



Contributing to the evidence base about what works

FaCS may also wish to consider whether it would be useful to review in more depth these methods of assessing strengths and identifying gaps with a view to supporting future programs and contributing to future policies.

For projects that are developing inventories and asset registers as a key component of the project it may be useful for the Strategy to find out:

- When inventories and asset registers are prepared, what evidence is there that they are accessed and used by the community? How and by whom?
- How else are they used? (E.g. primarily by project co-ordinators to apply community resources to a specific project).
- What features of asset registers affect their accessibility and usefulness?
- How are they updated and managed as a management information system (including issues of privacy)?

5.6 Application to Indigenous communities – further research needed

As indicated in the introduction to this paper, we have not addressed issues relating to the development and application of capacity in Indigenous communities. Because Indigenous communities are to be the focus of various other issues papers and case studies, we deliberately excluded Indigenous projects from our review.

The applicability of some of the lessons learnt through this review therefore needs to be explored specifically in relation to Indigenous communities. It is a real challenge to build the capacity of communities that have a long history of dependence on others. Some additional issues or particular emphases that we foreshadow as likely to be important for Indigenous communities are discussed below:

- This paper identified the development of social capital as an important aspect of community capacity, and within social capital identified trust as one component.
Development of the ‘invisibles of community regeneration; namely trust, confidence and connection are especially important considerations in Indigenous contexts. The historic pattern of interactions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and government has left a legacy of general distrust that will be difficult to overturn. People have been so accustomed to government control that confidence and a ‘can do’ spirit need to be carefully nurtured.
- In Indigenous contexts ‘cultural strength’, ‘cultural capital’ and ‘cultural capacity’ (ie the capacity to practice and maintain culture) are important dimensions. These concepts have been referred to but not discussed in this paper.
- In this paper we reported examples of the positive effects on community self-confidence of undertaking an assets assessment. These effects may be particularly beneficial for Indigenous communities.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are traumatised and in need of healing before they can begin to engage. Participation presupposes some degree



of optimism about the future and a commitment to act. A strength (asset) based approach may have particular relevance to capacity building in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities precisely because of the need to generate optimism and confidence. Also, one project reviewed for this paper, commented on some successes in engaging Koori youth. It may be helpful to find out more from the project about the strategies it used.

- This paper refers to the fact that some communities may need to develop some basic institutional capital as a prerequisite for planning and implementing other capacity building projects. It has also identified some of the difficulties involved in doing so (how and where to start, keeping the community interested, extended timeframes for achieving outcomes that are perceived as worthwhile etc).

Indigenous communities generally fit the category of not having “a history of involvement in capacity building and community strengthening projects” and as a consequence it may be even more important to work on developing upstream and institutional capacity first. Given that the starting point of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander communities is well below the first rung on the ladder it seems unlikely that they will produce outcomes at the higher levels of the Hierarchy.

- This paper has identified several types of capital that contribute to community capacity. Some communities will tend to have more of some types of capital and less of others.

Generally speaking, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities demonstrate considerable capacity in some spheres (notably cultural and recreational activities), whilst lacking capacity in others (eg governance structures and processes). Arguably many governance structures and processes in Indigenous communities erode capacity because they leave the participants feeling that they are failures who are incapable of managing their own affairs. It is important not to construct Aboriginal communities as always (almost by definition) lacking in education, training, health, capacity etc.

- This paper referred briefly to the distinction between bonding and bridging capital as components of social capital.

Indigenous communities may have considerable stocks of bonding social capital on account of their family, clan and community connections. However they are typically lacking in linking and bridging social capital, with few established partnerships and networks to be drawn upon that reach those in positions of power and with the capacity to shape resource allocation decisions.

- This paper has commented that movement of people in and out of the community and in and out of the project can clearly erode some of the capacity that has been built up.

This is a particularly crucial issue within Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander communities which are characterised by high turnover of both community workers and those recruited from outside. Succession planning is another issue that may need to be explored in more detail with respect to Indigenous communities. The case study of a remote aboriginal community, may be a source of insights.

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Community Capacity Building

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