

Book Review

Community Development Around the World: Practice, Theory, Research and Training

by Hubert Campfens

University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1997

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Campfens undertakes an impressive and difficult task: to review the practise of community development (CD) from a global perspective in order to provide us with a broad understanding of the state of the art in CD practise and theory. His text, directed towards policy makers, program planners, leaders and students of CD, consists of a historical overview of the development of the CD approach and its use as an alternative to state directed planning; a series of twenty case studies from 6 different countries in two groupings: three in the industrialized north: Canada, Netherlands, Israel and three in the third world: Ghana, Bangladesh and Chile; and a final section which compares the various CD experiences and draws some conclusions on how to improve its workings.

Each of the six chapters which describes and analyses the practise of CD in the six countries follows a similar format: a short introduction which describes the roots, history, and political context of CD in the country, a section describing the current practise of CD using case studies, a discussion of the institutions and programs which support the use of CD, and sections discussing issues surrounding education and training, developments in research and theory.

The case studies, all prepared by practitioners and scholars of the countries they are writing about, describe the use of CD in a wide variety of situations: in large urban centres such as Toronto (The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture) and Vancouver (Entre Nous Femmes Housing Society), Amsterdam (Flesseman Project: Neighbourhood Services for the Elderly), in rural communities (Nandanpur Farmer's Co-operative Society in Bangladesh, the Integrated Community Centres for Employable Skills in Ghana). This is an insiders' view of CD practise and theory within each country.

The final chapter is an excellent attempt at pulling together the varied contexts and interpretations of CD into a framework theory that is useful for policy development, program planning and CD practise, that is grounded in contemporary economic, political and social realities and that takes into consideration differences in cultures and systems. He argues for the central importance of context, ie that the environmental context will determine the CD that one practises.

The text also discusses two issues which are often not mentioned in discussions about CD: the first relates to the institutions and programs that are required to support the practise of CD. The second relates to the education and training

of CD workers. Both are important issues and central to making CD effective. Often we don't think of what is needed in order to create an environment supportive of CD. Campfens et al. provide excellent insight into these issues.

The one main weakness of the text is its lack of attention to the practise of CD in Canadian Aboriginal communities. CD, including CED has been the development approach of choice since the early 1970's. One of the first Aboriginal statements on development within Indian communities: Whabung, Our Tomorrows by the Indian Chiefs of Manitoba reads like a classic CD statement. This absence is surprising but indicative of the lack of attention paid to Aboriginal development issues outside of small group of practitioners and public policy makers.

One of the main contributions of the text is showing us a way to make some sense of the environment (political, social, cultural) that is helpful in thinking about approaches to CD. The diverse CD environments that Campfens et al. describe have some elements in common with

Aboriginal environments in Canada. There are lessons here for policy makers and practitioners of Aboriginal CD. The first is to connect Aboriginal community development issues to broader global development issues which permits perhaps a more strategic cd approach; the second is to give some hope that we are achieving something and that the approach that we favour is also favoured by a great number of people around the world and is highly effective.

I like this text. It provides sufficient detail so that I have a feel for the social, political and economic context of each country as well as the various approaches to CD practised there. I like the way in which Campfens attempts to pull it all together so that it all makes sense and is useful for policy makers and practitioners. It helps me to think more carefully about the development situations facing Aboriginal peoples, to analyse the environment in a systematic and discipline way and to think through the choice of a development approach. This is an excellent guide to the global practise of CD.