# An investigation into the training of Community Development Workers within South Africa

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**Introduction**

In his classic book *Training for Community Development: A Critical Study of Method* (1962:69), T. R. Batten argues that, ‘training is the key activity of any community development programme.’ Following Batten, and building on more recent literature, this article documents a research project that explored the training taking place within the South African National Community Development Worker Programme (CDWP). Many of the hopes of good community development work are built upon effective training of the workers. To fail in training community development workers (CDWs) is to ensure failure of programmes. Training by itself is rarely the solution to programme problems - programme failure is also related to broader systemic issues, for example, decision-making processes, resources and so forth. Despite this caveat we focus on how current training processes are failing to support the needs of CDWs within the national programme. In articulating these failures we then discuss some possible ways forward.

**Background**

The CDWP was launched in 2003 by the previous President Thabo Mbeki, but has continued to stay on the radar of Jacob Zuma, the current president. The national programme, employing approximately 4,000 community development workers, is funded nationally, administrated provincially and operationalised through the local wards of local Municipalities. CDWs are public service employees. The personnel goal of the programme is to place one CDW in each Ward thereby ‘servicing’ approximately 12,000 people per ward.

The programme structure varies from province to province. This study focused on the Free State and the Western Cape. CDWs are held accountable to local municipality public participation officers, and tasked to work in collaboration with people and groups such as Ward Councillors (elected), local Ward Committees (with people representing sectors such as health, education, women, youth), other sectoral community workers (including health, agriculture, housing, land affairs), and other State officials.

Within the Free State Province the CDW programme is administered by the CDW Unit, located in the Department of Public Service and Administration**.** Within the Western Cape the CDW programme is administered from the Provincial Department of Local Government as a CDW Programme Directorate. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) are instituted to regulate the relationship between CDWs and local municipalities mainly around logistics and use of municipal resources.

**The literature: locating the CDW program within the literature on training CD workers**

In this brief literature review we will consider three literatures used in our approach to this project and our discussion of the findings. The first is related to a literature on large-scale nationally oriented community development (CD) programmes, the second to how practitioners learn, and the third to how we understand training as a concept within educational and learning contexts.

In reference to the literature on large scale CD programmes, Van Rooyen’s (2007) analysis of key lessons distilled from experiences of international community worker programmes, argued that two of the four key focus areas for effective national CD programmes are within the sphere of learning for workers – initial and continual training, and then on-going support and supervision. Her research indicates that: firstly, training courses should be developed contextually, particularly through incorporating ideas from the specific communities and areas where the work is located (Bhattacharyya, Leban, Winch and Tien, 2001:22); secondly, some kind of training tools and practice opportunities, should be developed (Morgan, 2000:5); and, thirdly, on-going support and/or in-service refresher courses are essential to reinforce and update the knowledge of the workers. This also assists in their continual professional development.

Other recent research on community worker training within national initiatives identifies the importance of training (Finger, 1999:3; Friedman, 2002:175; Morreira, 1999:14), arguing that this training should be ongoing (Cruse, 1997:3), it should be community-based (Bhattacharyya *et al*., 2001:22; Mariner, Roeder and Admassu, 2002: 31), problem- and solution-oriented (Advance Africa, 2003:2), and finally, draw on an experiential educational process (Finger, 1999:3).

Prior to establishing CD programmes there is often a lack of people with expertise, either in CD itself, and/or also in training methodologies, resulting in trainers providing training along traditional didactic lines (Finger, 1993:3; Chambers, 2005). Such didactic lines lead to assumptions such as: the trainer trains and the trainees are being trained – the relationship is one of an instructor (rather than facilitator or provocateur); the instructor is competent, and if allowed sufficient time will produce fully fledged workers - the emphasis is therefore on preliminary or pre-service training. In-service is seen as a desirable ‘extra’ rather than essential, if not the key; members of a training group need the same content – same knowledge and skills, and input is designed into subjects or blocks; the trainer assumes a stance of authority over trainees, seeing themselves as more competent.

Evaluations in the field argue that such training assumptions work for much technically- oriented training: but not for CD training, or at least not human, relational, and group dimensions of the work. Studies indicate that the best training consists of: case studies, role playing and direct supervised work experiences; combined with a consciousness that the way a group of trainees work with each other, named by George Lakey (2010) as ‘the container’, was key, and; recognition that how trainer models interaction with traineeswas indicative. In a sense then the trainer-trainee relationship potentially models a good example of community development practice and the training process then becomes a laboratory for learning.

The above-mentioned recent literature builds on a long lineage of research and writing that goes back to Batten’s classic work mentioned within the introduction. We highlight this work to show that despite his work being 50 years old, the analysis is still pertinent. Batten (1962) suggested community development is profoundly different to most kinds of development work. This continues to be so. CD, like most development work is intended directly to affect the lives of many ordinary people, but it is different to most other development work in that it depends for its success on people’s willingness and active cooperation. It is a field of practice concerned with questions such as how to assist people to take the initiative and how to foster a sense of partnership. Batten (1962:4) therefore argued that,

‘Planners and administrators of CD have recognised that for their purposes they need a new kind of worker: one who is able to get on well with the common people, knowledgeable about their way of life, in sympathy with their hopes and aspirations, and genuinely desirous of helping them’.

He further argued that such worker[s],

‘...need enthusiasm, good intentions, and liking and respect for people plus a wide range of knowledge and skills. [S]he has to be able to stimulate, educate, inform, and convince people who may be apathetic or sceptical. [S]he has to be able to win the confidence of local leaders, heal their rivalries, and get them to work together for the common good. [S]he has to be skilled in working with groups and whole communities’ (ibid:5).

Batten also noted that CD workers, employed as public servants, are inevitably surrounded by a hierarchy of administration and supervising officers. In the light of this he argued that, ‘despite an excellent training regime with CD workers little will be achieved if this surrounding bureaucracy is unable to work in an enabling way with the grassroots workers’ (ibid:5). This focuses the gaze then on not only the training of CD workers, but also on training the contextual stakeholders. Batten argued that in CD ‘the people’ are the ultimate authority; they provide the real mandate for a community-based initiative moving forward. If an administrative agency ignores this, ‘if for example, by pressing too ambitious a programme on its workers, or by expecting them to achieve too much in too short a time, they in turn will be led to press too hard upon the people. They will then lose influence over them and be unable to do really effective work. This problem occurs most acutely in big, nation-wide programmes’ (ibid:7).

Furthermore, our study builds on the work of Hoggett *et al.* (2009), who when reflecting on the UK context for community development in 2008–2009, point out that operating in the boundary between the state and civil society has become more difficult for community workers. Such analysis builds on the comprehensive and internationally comparative analysis complied within the edited collection by Craig, Popple and Shaw (2008). For these commentators, new liberalism has changed relations between the state and its publics, obscuring the civil sphere and facilitating the substitution of consumerism for citizenship. New public management has instituted a drive for quick measurable outputs from short-term projects within an audit and performative culture. These shifts do not support the long-term development goals of communities and give rise to many practitioner dilemmas. This literature ensures that our study of the training regime for CDWs is again located within a broader institutional analysis.

Summing up, the core lesson from the literature on training CD workers is that ultimately no preliminary training will produce effective workers. Firstly, there is never enough time to teach all that is imagined to be important; but secondly, and more importantly, there is a lack of worker experience in the field. Nothing done at any preliminary stage can change that. Therefore, the key is in-service training – which enables training to respond to the dynamic and diverse nature of CD. Such in-service training can include refresher courses, seminars, workshops, but with a special need to focus on on-the-job training around actual projects.

Our second review of the literature briefly considers what we know about how CD practitioners learn. Firstly, it should also be noted that the literature on how professionals build knowledge from practice has a long history, which contests notions that scientific evidence and formal education is the best or only way to develop professional knowledge. Gilbert Ryle (1949:41) said ‘we learn how by practice’. Theory, he said, comes later. Polyani (1967) identified that much practice knowledge is tacit, not easily made explicit, because it is drawn from experiences that are embedded in culture and community. Argyris and Schon (1978) raised the interesting problematic that workers’ espoused theories were not the theories evident in their practice. They promoted reflection, or ‘double loop learning’, as a means of bridging between what we say we do and what we actually do. In social work, Fook (2000) articulated processes of promoted reflection and reflexivity both to enhance learning from practice and to identify the role of taken for granted social or personal conceptions. Flagging Illich (1973), Lave and Wenger (1991) propose that practice learning may be less an individual, and more a social enterprise, that occurs in everyday settings rather than formal learning contexts. They use the term communities of practice to signal the process of engaging in learning with others in a shared domain of endeavour. We will return to such ideas within our discussion.

Finally, referring to our third literature review, we recognize that training is often used within discourses of vocational and workplace training. The focus of such training is often on instruction and the underpinning philosophy is usually a neo-liberal political economy – that is, training needs driven by employer needs. In contrast we highlight a literature which provides examples of training being used within the radical tradition – often focused more on democratic and participatory processes. The integration of learning and action within a radical tradition of training has been best articulated in an accessible way to community workers by Hope and Timmel (1984) but was recently reclaimed by Brookfield and Holst (2011). The latter go on to argue that the ‘term training has suffered a downgrading to the point that… many adult educators in North America [and elsewhere]… avoid using the word’ (2011:66). In tackling this avoidance head on, and as part of reclaiming the radical idea of training Brookfield and Holst take the time to both review the many contemporary narrow definitions of what is generally considered to be training today, and then also overview historical and contemporary examples of training within the radical tradition. For example, they discuss, amongst others:

* The Highlander Folk School with its focus on leadership training and training for citizenship;
* Brazil’s Landless Workers Movement, with its training of people in cooperatives.

In distilling the practices of such a radical training tradition they identified the following key themes:

* Training as the mastery of action (practice) and the mastery of principle (theory) conceived dialectically;
* A central element is affective and relational – building the skills, understanding, and confidence of people;
* A significant amount of training takes place in the actual activities of social movements; it is training in action;
* Training is a mutual relationship where both the trainer and the trainee are trained;
* Training is participatory and democratic in methodology;
* Training is not neutral: it is oriented to serving the needs of specific sectors of society; is attempts to advance social change activism towards a more participatory and democratic society; it is, therefore, as much a political act as it is a pedagogical act (ibid: 85).

This description of key practices resonates well with our perspective of training, justifying our on-going use of the term.

Having considered the three key literatures relevant to this study we now explain our methodology.

**Methodology**

Research was conducted on the training provided to CDWs of both the Free State and Western Cape Provincial sections of the National Community Development Programme of South Africa in 2011. Two provinces were chosen for the fieldwork, not for the purposes of comparison but to strengthen the possibility of generalising recommendations. Major differences in findings between the provinces have been reported – but this was not an objective. This research project consisted of a discursive analysis of training documents and reports relevant to the CDW programme, 16 individual interviews, a focus group with six more community development workers, an interview with a trainer into the CDW programme and a further interview with the manager of the Free State Programme. Finally the research included reflection on one of the authors’ facilitation of two days of in-service training provided for 30 CDWs (in March 2011). We acknowledge that the sample is relatively small, however we found that at the point of 16 interviews reoccurring themes had emerged.

Relevant documents were accessed from the national web site (Community Development Unit), such as *A Handbook for Community Development Workers* (2007), *Grassroots Innovation: A guide for communities about community development workers* (2007), and the Free State Province five year Master Plan and modularised training documents.

In-depth interviews were conducted using a purposeful sampling process ensuring representation from various Wards in the Free State Province. In the Western Cape a convenient sampling was taken out of two districts, one rural and one urban. Personal notes were also taken throughout the training process facilitated. All of the interviews, and the focus group were conducted face-to-face. The interviews and focus group were transcribed and analysed manually. Several colleagues and respondents read and commented on the initial findings.

Data analysis was conducted drawing on an appreciative inquiry framework, looking for both the positive experiences of training, but also identifying participant’s critical feedback.

**Findings**

***A caveat:*** As stated earlier within this article, while focusing this chapter on training we also acknowledge that training is not the solution to many problems facing any community development programme. The major challenges are usually related to broader issues such as organisational capabilities, structures, relationships, context and so forth. An organisation or programme often does not function due to these organisational issues, not training issues.

Confirming this acknowledgement, we found within the research process that even though the focus of this component of our research was on the training experienced or accessed by CDWs they were keen to digress into the broader issues affecting their work including the politics, internal dynamics and the lack of resources that they had to deal with on a daily basis. Training was more our concern than theirs. For example, when talking through some of their concerns, trainees focused continuously on resources – lack of mobile phones, writing material, and even pens. This lack of resources impacted profoundly on their morale. They felt unappreciated, uncared for. There was a sense that management was not really responsive to their requests for such needs. However, having heard these very real concerns the research instrument still focused on eliciting participants experiences of training.

***The training programme for CDWs***

Before discussing findings around the *experience* of the training, we first focus on findings about the current training programme provided to participants.

There are approximately 300 CDWs within the Free State Province and 178 within the Western Cape. This is closely aligned with the overall national goal of ‘deploying’ one CDW per Ward. Currently in the Free State, they are recruited through a process that involves: the local elected Councillor making a recommendation, followed by an interview process – often understood as a process of ‘deployment’. The Free State Manager informed us that, ‘there are hopes that by 2012 this recruitment procedure will have been changed, focused on a process that is both transparent and oriented towards merit’. In the Western Cape a formal approach was adopted through adverts placed in newspapers and interview panels appointed to steer the selection process. Nonetheless, many CDWs with previous activist backgrounds were taken up in the programme. However one interviewee was quite adamant about not being a ‘deployed’ CDW, but had come into the programme based purely on the love for doing community work. Most people who join the CDW programme come with a matric qualification. It should be noted that our research indicates that CDWs with a background as activists, without even having done any formal training within the programme, had an intuitive sense of how communities work. For example, one CDW located in a rural area, an x union worker, shared the story of how he was handing out garden implements to local people to grow vegetables in community or household gardens. He had seen one woman who did not seem interested (had a neglected garden). He decided not to give her the implements, but would instead wait for her to come and ask for them. His rationale was that she needed to have a genuine motivation for the initiative. She did approach the CDW that led to opportunity to talk and enter a conversation about community development and her desires for change. This is one example of a CDW with an activist background knowing how to work with the people.

Within both provinces these new recruits are then initiated, as CD trainees or candidates, into a period of one year on-the-job training. Not all the candidates trained were finally employed as CDWs.

Within the Free State this programme involves working in wards, while also attending five live-in training blocksinto which eight training modules are provided by a training provider. For example, within the Free State community development programme, the training is currently provided by an accredited consultant from Limpopo. Within the Western Cape the learnership lasting for one full year with the formal training offered at the University of the Western Cape. Candidates attended three three-month blocks followed by one-month field placements. The large quantity of trainees was subdivided into district groups. One trainee spoke of between 25 and 30 candidates in her group, manageable for two facilitator trainers assigned to each group.

Within the Western Cape a variety of topics were covered including the following: facilitation skill; project management; meeting procedure; how to draft a business plan; communication; computer skills; how government works. Furthermore, the training modules are situated within the South African national qualification framework (NQF), underpinned by a competency-based training approach. Within the Free State training each of the five blocks of trainings therefore consist not only of eight training modules, but are also broken down into specific unit standards each consisting of explicit learning outcomes.

Having completed this programme, trainees ‘graduated’ with a level-four accredited certificate and are able to articulate into public service employees, officially titled as Community Development Workers. As employees of the public sector further training is available, but these are courses offered by the normal public service training provider – they were not focused on specific community development knowledge and skills. There is no tailor made in-service CD training. This has been identified as a gap by both co-ordinators of the CDW programme and 30 CDWs one of the authors trained, and participants in focus groups and interviews.

***A disjuncture between training and practice***

Turning now to participants’ experience of the training a key finding of this research project was that although participants felt initial block training was effective, as soon as they entered the field they experienced a disjuncture between their training experiences and the practice needs in-the-field. This is illustrated in the following dialogue that took place within the Free State focus group:

*The training was done by [name] at Qwaqwa and the material which was used, according to my side it was excellent – and anything we have been taught has been excellent. The problem started when we went to the field – it was totally different story – we ask ourselves questions – we have been taught like this, but the practical work is different. (Focus Group: FS #1)*

*No, I think it did match – it was very good – everything we were taught was what we are doing, but problem is the practice – it is more intense in the real life. (Focus Group: FS #2)*

Both participants are highlighting the disjuncture between workshop/class-room pre-service training and the practice realities. There is no surprise here when we consider the literature reviewed earlier.

***A lack of on-the-job support – in-service training***

Participant two above provides further analysis about the problem of the current training framework that again is workshop/classroom focused. S/he argues that the real problem was a lack of skilled support on-the-job:

*We had blocks when we spend five days at school, in an old teaching training college... and then in between we were in our wards alone doing what we were taught. There was no one to help at that stage.*

*Interviewer: no experienced CD worker to help you?*

*No and it is challenging, because we have to work with ward councillor and ward committees to train them as well. But it was not comprehensive enough – we need more training. I must not say let’s form a co-operative and then I can’t help, and then it fails – then I have failed them. If we only offer promises these people say ‘these people are wasting our time’.*

This participant identifies two areas of training: content issues (in this case about how to set up and support a co-operative – discussed further below) and training method (including where and when the training should take place). In relation to content the CDW feels like a fraud – s/he has been set up to fail in her/his work. S/he must resource others in a ways s/he him/herself has not been resourced. Furthermore s/he experiences profound despair at ‘failing’ people within the community. In relation to method s/he is arguing that the key failure within the training was not having a ‘trainer’ accompany the worker on the job.

Participants from the Western Cape also indicated that there is not a dedicated programme of CD specific in-service training for CDWs. Training that does happen is often sporadic with no predetermined schedule or connection to a strategy based on surveyed needs. All CDWs are subjected to a system of performance reviews held on a quarterly basis. These reviews allow CDWs to indicate what their training needs are from a prescribed menu of options, mostly government related, for example, computer skills or labour law.

However the frustration develops further when these requests are not followed up in the system, and over the years CDWs have become cynical about this aspect of the performance review process. They continue to fill it in because they have to. From the CDWs interviewed within the Western Cape, some have repeatedly made specific requests regarding training, that have relevance for their performance both individually as well as in team functioning. The following participant noted:

*We choose our training each quarter when we do our reviews, but for 95% of the time, we don’t get what we ask for. For example we did not get Xhosa* [language skills] *and we are part of a mixed team, so we find that we sometimes don’t understand each other in meetings (WC#2).*

It is clear that CDWs want training, but their ongoing needs are somehow being ignored in the system. It is not clear where the blockage occurs, whether it is their immediate line management or higher up. Such experiences affirm Du Gay’s (1996:182) analysis that increasingly the responsibility of accessing training is with the CDWs themselves reflecting new public management approaches. Our analysis is that also within these bigger bureaucracies performance reviews tend to become rituals without any substance or meaning – just useful in being able to tick off the block on the management checklist. As one CDW put it:

[When nothing happens] *No explanation is given and we don’t ask. (WC#1)*

***Peer learning***

Participants within the research did however argue that, despite the disjuncture between pre-service and available in-service learning and real needs, CDWs were finding ways of learning. One, a young energetic female practitioner, starts to reflect on how people learn in groups, as peers from one another:

*...although much of what you taught us we learnt, in groups, discussion. Some of us are slow learners and don’t understand when you talk or teach them. But if you are in a group we can be on the same level and talk – they understand in this way (FS#6).*

Again, the comment highlights a methodology issue. She is highlighting that while there are formal learning processes – often didactic within large groups; her experience is that most learning takes place within the small group discussions. Other participants also talked about how more learning was taking place informally when CDWs met together in the field and talked about their work, sharing stories/struggles/lessons.

The following Free State participant discusses how this takes place:

*Interviewer: If you were in a community and you didn’t know what to do where would you turn?*

*I’d first talk to my colleagues – we encounter different problems; I’d ask what did they do. We keep contact with colleagues; we get to know each other in the training because we are together. …We meet regularly, every day because we have to move from our ward to the municipal offices to sign in each day. We all meet in the offices (FS#4).*

Her answer focuses on the collegial networks developed which are then the main resources in supporting practitioners in on-going trouble-shooting. This was reinforced by the comments of another CDW:

*We meet once/month and then we discuss and share daily experiences and talk about to deal with problems. We can then tackle issues as a programme (FS#7).*

Although there are the normal interpersonal tensions experienced, CDWs do offer one another support when it really matters. The urban context has particular challenges with regard to the security of CDWs.

*I get help from my colleagues. A week ago someone got shot and I had to counsel. We have to go into communities and do fact finding. Sometimes we have very threatening situations. We said that we need debriefing. As colleagues, although we sometimes fight among each other, we support each other in these situations. In the office we let off steam with each other. We discuss problems among ourselves (WC#2).*

***Training of other stakeholders***

The fourth main theme to emerge from the data was related to the need for training of other stakeholders. The following participant comments on the lack of training of other officials whom CDWs are meant to work with, supporting the arguments and conclusions of Batten (1962), as per the literature review:

*The challenge was in the field – difficult for ward councillors and from other officials from other departments don’t understand our work. But it is better. (Focus Group FS#3)*

Other participants also argued this point:

*The CDWs have not been popularised – the adverts were popularised, but the CDWs role has not been. Other officials do not know who we are and what we do. (Focus Group FS#5)*

Another participant also goes onto to critique some changes that have occurred within the programme. He argues that:

*The other thing I want to highlight – our former public minister – she was concerned about the programme – they jot down the policies needed in this programme, but like politics after she left everything slowed down. We used to have one meeting a year; an indaba – but now three years has gone by and it is has been silent. (Focus Group FS#1)*

Within such a narrative is an understanding of the importance of bringing CDWs together regularly to learn together, share their experiences and distil good practice. According to the participant this used to happen, but no longer, with dire consequences.

**Discussion**

At best our findings indicate that the initial training regime offered has significantly underestimated what was actually needed on the ground. Overall CDWs initially found the pre-service training to be good, but once in the field discovered it was highly inadequate. Not learning from over 50 years of literature (since Batten) the programming of training has made the core mistake of focusing too much on pre-service rather than in-service training. Furthermore, the CDW programme has failed to engage successfully in the training of stakeholders relevant to the CDW work – mainly other government officials. Finally, CDWs affirm the need for a strategy of professionalism – one which we will return to in the conclusion.

Having summarised our findings we now offer some ways forward.

***Developing practice frameworks – organisational and personal***

Analysis of the findings indicates that many of the CDWs are working from different practice frameworks, or divergent understandings of community development practice. We refer to practice frameworks as a way of organising how people think about and conduct their practice within communities in a way that is coherent, intentional and purposeful. Having a CD framework, or what Dorothy Gamble and Marie Weil (2010: 115) call a clear ‘paradigm of practice’, is a sure way of facilitating a purposeful process (Westoby & Ingamells, 2011). Interviews indicate that people understand their work differently – they either have different frameworks, or are not working from a coherent one.

To a degree this would appear to be functional – most people interpret organisational frameworks of practice (one supplied through the Department) through their own personal lens. What is understood initially as normative – that is, what practitioners *should* be doing, is over time re-understood through the lens of constructivist knowledge and practice – that is, what *can* be done within the context.

It is argued that what is needed is a clear organisational CD practice framework – a coherent understanding of what CDWs should be doing, what they are mandated to do by the CDW program, also informed by a clear process methodology – that is, how to achieve what the department wants. There appear to be pockets of this occurring, with some regions exploring the utility of a sustainable livelihoods framework. Such an organisational CD practice framework will be interpreted and re-interpreted by practitioner’s *in-situ*. The integration of a normative organisational practice framework with such factors as context, personality and experience leads to a personal practice framework that over time should be easily articulated publically by practitioners (Westoby & Ingamells, 2011).

This is the core material for supervision – a relationship between a practitioner and supervisor that is not only management oriented (which is also needed) but also oriented towards reflective practice, constructing a personal practice framework that mixes CDWs personal experience with the departmental organisational framework (see Westoby & Ingamels, 2011; Ife & Tesoriero, 2006).

Such practice frameworks could:

* Enable people to understand their tasks and activities in the light of key community development movements and processes, such as: from “I” to “We”, from *working for* (servicing) to *working with* (supporting and facilitating); conceptually understand key ideas such as community, development, poverty, empowerment and capacitation – both within an historical and contemporary perspective;
* Engage different frameworks of practice such as*:* assets based approach (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2008), sustainable livelihoods approach (Chambers, 1997), dialogical approach (Westoby & Dowling, 2009), rights based approach (Ife, 2011) and so forth; and
* Navigate the complex political realities that they find themselves embedded and enmeshed within – both with localities they work within and also within departmental politics.

Clearly, developing supervisory capacity to enable such reflective practice is a core challenge for the CDW program. How to do this would be the topic of another article, however, our initial thoughts would point towards drawing from CDWs who demonstrate reflective capacities and inducting them into supervisory processes and techniques such as outlined in the classic text *Supervision in the Helping Professions* (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006).

***Capacity-building***

A significant finding is the need for the development of more capacity in CDWs as a result of in-service processes of learning, education and training. Drawing on recent ‘capacity development’ literature, particularly the work of Ubels *et al.* (2010:174-177), Chambers (2005:119ff) evaluative work on ‘scaling-up’ participatory practice, and thoughts of the CDWs involved in the research, future directions could include several practices.

It would be timely to initiate local-level action research and action learning processes that distil successful good practice at local level and then disseminate such practice through the regional offices and national programme. Such locally learnt good practice could be diffused through horizontal learning peer-oriented processes, via local CDWs who have learnt good practice. Exchanges between wards and provinces would be effective mechanisms. Accompanying this it would be useful to identify champions of change who have stuck with the CDW work for some time and who, with their historical memory, ensure reflective capabilities and some level of continuity of learning.

It is essential that the CDWP provide responsive and flexible capacity-development support to local CDWs and other involved local stakeholders to adopt new insights and develop better working practices. This approach requires not so much rolling out more training modules on top of existing public service ones, but freeing such capacity-development practitioners (‘champions’) to accompanying local CDWs in understanding their local situation and working contextually. Capacity-building needs to be a process of supporting local CDWs *in situ* helping them to learn how to navigate the complexities of their daily work. However, in saying this, any training that is provided should be flexible and trainer-friendly menu-oriented curricula rather than ‘falling-back’ upon a manual that prescribes what learning should take place (Chambers, 2005). Accompanying such capacity-development and any additional training could also take the form of the development of a set of words, sayings and stories (ibid, 2005) that reflect the transformational heart of the CDW work. Facilitator ‘words’ and ‘sayings’ such as ‘hand over the pen’, or ‘hold your agenda lightly’, or ‘start with the people, but don’t stay with the people’, which remind workers about process are important.

It should also be noted that it would be helpful for managers and CDWs to pay significant attention to the changing dynamics and working practices between the different sectors between programmes (of different government departments) and hierarchical levels (within the programme and the auspice department). Such attention requires the building of trust between programmes and levels, one facilitated through and by communication flow (mainly from the bottom-up, rather than top-down), and developing more participatory procedures for planning, budgeting and disbursement.

Finally, keeping the training programme ‘on-track’ also requires the ‘hosting’ or co-ordinating organisation to remain engaged in its own on-going transformational process ensuring that there is a supportive action learning environment that fosters experimentation, risk-taking, honest reflection, and change.

This last point is built upon within our next discussion.

***Creating a learning organisation***

Our reflection on the findings also indicate that the national or provincial department (for example, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs within the Free State) or unit ‘hosting’ the CDWP needs to be transformed into a learning organisation that enables ‘communities of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to thrive. Such a learning organisation could be fostered in the following ways.

Firstly, building on our previous discussion point, the policy arm of the relevant department could generate two to three key national level action-research questions that create a framework for discussion amongst districts and provincial offices. For example, the kinds of questions that seem pertinent would be:

* What is the key niche or contribution of the CDW programme within the complex nexus of other community-based and sector-oriented initiatives?
* What is a typology of practice that distinguishes the different activities CDWs are involved in facilitating?

Secondly, a learning facilitator could be appointed within each area (possible a percentage of time from a supervisors existing role) whose role would be to strengthen what appears to be happening informally, through facilitating activities such as: creation of a buddy system among workers; monthly round table discussions among groups of CDWs - with the goal of distilling good local-level practice and also thinking through the proposed national action-research questions; and, documenting with CDWs case studies of initiatives that have failed and succeeded and again, distilling the contributing factors.

Finally, there should be a process of creating incentives for CDWs who demonstrate reflective practice, rather than focus simply on reporting numerical outputs and outcomes.

**Conclusion**

South Africa has not had a history of large-scale training or education of community development workers. The CDWP is a key government initiative that can act as a catalyst for developing such educational initiatives. This is currently starting to happen with the development of the new National Community Development Policy Framework (2011), and also an approved national qualification framework for community development. It is hoped that our analysis of the current training provided to the CDWP and the recommendations discussed above would further act as a catalyst for transforming the kind of education and training accessible to the CDWs.

Drawing on the literature, our experience and the research findings, we have therefore argued for a more carefully designed reform of the CDW training regime, focused primarily on: enabling CDWs to build their own community development practice frameworks (or paradigms of practice), within the context of a clear organisational framework; capacity-building of CDWs as a core focus of in-service training; and, finally the integration of such capacity-building into re-imagined institutional contexts that need to be primarily thought of as a learning organisation rather than a ‘programme host’.

Reiterating the key issues highlighted in the 1960s by Batten, and then reinforced and added to by more recent literature, the on-going processes of in-service training, technical expertise/support and close supervision seem to be low on the agenda of the CDWP. Such processes need to be carefully re-thought as per the kinds of suggestions we have offered, recognising that such processes need to be complemented within a more integrated process of institutional change and integration.

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