

# Asset-Based Community Development Applications A Synthesis

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Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a development framework which focuses on the capacities, skills and social resources of people and their communities, rather than initially focusing on the needs, deficiencies, constraints and problems of a community.<sup>1</sup> This document contains three sections. The first section summarizes several papers which either (1) apply ABCD or similar asset-focused development frameworks in a rural/agricultural context and to development in Sub-Saharan Africa, or (2) provide general guidance on the implementation of ABCD approaches to development. The second section provides more detail on how Oxfam and the Coady International Institute have applied ABCD in Ethiopian communities. Finally, in order to provide an example of how ABCD might be applied to a Foundation project, the third section briefly notes how an ABCD strategy might differ from the Foundation's proposed constraints-based Bihar strategy.

## **ABCD Document Summaries:**

### **Agricultural and SSA-Specific Applications of ABCD**

**Ssewamala (2010). The Potential of Asset-Based Development Strategies for Poverty Alleviation in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Social Welfare* 19, pp. 433-443**

- Briefly analyzes the social costs of the historical reliance on structural adjustment program-based development aid.
- Provides a theoretical framework underlying ABCD, and explores tools and strategies for employing ABCD in SSA.

**Russel (2009). From Needs to Assets: Charting a Sustainable Path towards Development in Sub-Saharan African Countries.**

- Russel is a faculty member of the Asset Based Community Development Institute founded by ABCD pioneers McKnight and Kretzmann.
- He makes an argument for how Asset-Based Community Development should be applied to poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Criticizes needs-based approach for disempowering local communities that become dependent on aid.

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<sup>1</sup> Kretzmann, JP, & McKnight, JL (1993). *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Towards Finding and Mobilising communities' assets*. Chicago: Acta Publications.

NOTE: The findings and conclusions contained within this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

- Summarizes (See table reproduced below) how asset-based community development differs from needs-based development, and from certain approaches he defines to be ABCD-compatible: The World Bank's participatory rural appraisal process (PRA), the UK Department of Foreign and International Development's sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) and the UNHCR's "rights-based" development approach.

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Need-based</b>	<b>PRA (World Bank)</b>	<b>SLA (DFID)</b>	<b>Rights-Based Approach (UNHCR)</b>	<b>ABCD</b>
<b>Orientation</b>	External	Internal/external	Internal/external	Internal/external	Internal
<b>Assessment</b>	Needs, problems and what is missing	Needs and local wisdom	Assets and strengths	Assessment of human rights policy and practice	What has worked community strengths and assets
<b>Relationship between institution and community</b>	Community as passive recipient of aid and programs	Co-designers of services and programs	Co-designers	Institution aims to empower and protect rights	Co-producers/ citizens
<b>Development of Solutions</b>	Experts, externally-driven	Local knowledge to co-develop programs and projects	Local knowledge and area-based solutions	Citizens as center of development process and directors of development	Citizen-driven internal solutions
<b>Capacity Building</b>	External, professional/ institutional	Professional/ Institutional	Economic development in response to specific shock and on-going poverty	Institutional and citizen	Citizens and Associations
<b>Social Capital</b>	Not a deliberate strategy	Linking capital between NGO and community	Linking capital between NGO and community	Linking capital between institutions and citizens	Creation of bonding, bridging, and linking capital

*Reproduced from Russel 2009*

**Siegel (2005). Using an Asset-Based Approach to Identify Drivers of Sustainable Rural Growth and Poverty Reduction in Central America: A Conceptual Framework.**

- Applies an ABCD framework to rural development strategies in Central America.
- Describes how community assets that drive poverty-reduction can be identified and relied upon.

**Moser (2006). Asset-Based Approaches to Poverty Reduction in a Globalized Context.**

- Shows how asset-based approaches can help agencies better understand poverty and develop more appropriate long-term solutions.
- Discusses a longitudinal research project in Guayaquil, Ecuador that examined the relationship between assets and poverty in the community.

- Explores communal assets that can be identified in poor urban and rural communities.

**O-Leary (2006). Asset Based Approaches to Rural Community Development: Literature Review and Resources.**

- Identified ABCD approaches currently in use by the international development community, and describes development approaches that utilize approaches that are similar to or compatible with ABCD.
- “ABCD is one of a range of similar participative approaches. These include Participatory Rural Appraisal, the Ford Foundation’s Asset Building and Community Development, Community Driven Development used regularly at the World Bank and Rights Based Approaches that use the securing of human rights as their driving force.”
- Describes types of assets and capabilities that can be employed by communities in ABCD approaches.

**Deininger & Olito (2000). Why Liberalization Alone has not Improved Agricultural Productivity in Zambia.**

- Using data from 5000 rural households, the authors employ econometric methods to make conclusions about the productivity of different agricultural factors, including farm-level inputs and household assets.

**General Guidance on the Implementation of ABCD Approaches**

**Mathie & Cunningham (2003) Who is Driving Development? Reflection on the Transformative Potential of Asset-Based Community Development.**

- Explains the origins and theoretical underpinnings of ABCD.
- Explores how ABCD-compatible “sustainable livelihoods” approaches have been employed by DFID and UNDP, and how ABCD can be used to apply sustainable livelihoods frameworks at a community level.
- Argues “The niche for NGOs is now less in direct intervention and more in strengthening civil society to mediate between market and state.”

**Mathie & Cunningham (2003) From Clients to Citizens: Asset-Based Community Development as a Strategy for Community-Driven Development. *Development in Practice* 13, 5, pp. 474-486**

- Explains the theoretical rationale for asset-based community development instead of more traditional needs-based development approaches.
- Cites the following NGOs as practicing asset-based community development approaches: Myrada/Association for Social and Health Advancement (India); Khanya (South Africa); Private Agencies Collaborating Together (Nepal); World Vision Tanzania.
- Donor agencies with similar or complementary approaches to ABCD: Ford Foundation (“asset-building”); DFID (“sustainable livelihoods”).
- “ABCD is not *done* to communities by ABCD experts... (ABCD work) evolved from initiatives that occurred spontaneously in communities and municipalities experimenting with different strategies for change.”

**El Hadidy (2008). Possibilities for Income-Deprived but Capability-Rich Communities in Egypt. *From Clients to Citizens: Communities Changing the Course of Their Own Development.***

- Describes how an Egyptian village relied on internal assets and capabilities, rather than external support, to transform into a community with basic services and infrastructure.

**Rakodi (2002). A Capital Assets Framework for Analyzing Household Livelihood Strategies: Implications for Policy.**

- Assesses the poverty policy implications of adopting a household livelihood strategies framework built upon the capabilities, assets and activities of households, communities and society.

**Carter & Barrett (2006). The Economics of Poverty Traps and Persistent Poverty: An Asset-Based Approach.** *Journal of Development Studies* 42, 2, pp. 178-199

- Explores the importance of assets to poor households, and how that affects household movement in or out of poverty.
- Develops an asset poverty line analogous to more traditional expenditure or income-based poverty thresholds.
- Applies asset-based theory to poverty on both a microeconomic/household scale and a social/national scale.

## **Case Study of ABCD Implementation in Ethiopia:**

**Peters, B., Gonsamo, M., Molla, S. & Mathie, A (2009). Applying an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Approach in Ethiopia: Mid Term Evaluation Report Summary.**

<http://www.coady.stfx.ca/tinroom/assets/file/resources/publications/research/ABCD-approach-Ethiopia.pdf>

Since 2003, Oxfam Canada and the Coady Institute have been partnering with three Ethiopian NGOs to implement Asset-Based Community Development programs in 21 Ethiopian communities.

### **Implementation Strategy:**

- The ABCD training process, carried out primarily by the Ethiopian NGO organizations, began with structured interviewing of community members about positive changes that have occurred historically without external assistance. (p. 5) Examples of the responses elicited from one community included the recollection of historical communal investments in electricity access, school construction and dam fencing.
- Community participants then produced an “asset inventory” which mapped geographic, human, financial, social/associational and institutional assets. Examples of assets identified by community groups included livestock, trees, money deposited at a bank, roads, schools, and land.
- Community groups listed financial inflows and outflows to identify economic opportunities that could increase incomes or reduce expenditures. Groups identified livestock rearing and crop production as examples of financial inflows for the community, and identified chemical fertilizer purchases and spending on “extravagant” items such as coffee, alcohol and festivities as financial outflows.

- Finally, to prepare to translate assets into action, the groups formulated a community action plan that envisioned a desired change - such as potable water, improved land, or small enterprise development-based on local inputs and assets.
- The tools and techniques utilized during ABCD community training included (p. 22):
  - Map used to graphically represent physical and natural community assets, associations, and institutions.
  - A “leaky bucket” economic analytical tool to assist the identification of inflows and outflows.

### Reported Results:

Donor and stakeholder monitoring of the ABCD program’s progress identified three categories of changes: increased asset base, increased capacity to organize and mobilize resources to achieve development goals, and attitudinal change (p. 7).

- Asset base increase was realized by diversifying and increasing income sources, reducing expenditures, increasing savings, reinvesting savings, and protecting existing assets. “ABCD groups commented that these initiatives mobilized and employed more of their assets than previous initiatives and that they were responsible for more of the activities from start to finish (prioritizing, planning, implementing, following up, etc.)” (p. 8)
- Asset increases were primarily explained by two developments: (1) individual assets were pooled for joint activities which allowed groups to undertake riskier and more profitable activities and (2) asset mapping led to the emergence of new ideas for development.
- ABCD community participants reported an increased capacity to organize to achieve development goals as a result of an increased appreciation for the benefits of cooperative action, and through the establishment of more democratic and inclusive informal community groups. A key tenant of the ABCD framework that is supported by the observations of the Ethiopian implementation is that “people may be more willing to contribute... to activities they have identified as priorities themselves, as opposed to those introduced relatively arbitrarily by outside actors.” (p. 13).
- Attitudinal changes were expressed (1) through an increased appreciation for household and community assets and (2) once individuals or groups succeeded in improving their livelihood assets, they were motivated to undertake additional activities using a similar process. (p. 14).

### Hypothetical Application of ABCD in Bihar:

The various asset-based and asset-building development approaches currently theorized and employed by development organizations would probably each prescribe unique development strategy designs for Bihar. Nevertheless, most asset-based development strategies for Bihar would probably include the following characteristics:

- Instead of beginning the contextual analysis of development problems with an examination of “needs” such as high poverty levels, food insecurity, and business and governing environment failures, ABCD would begin by examining community assets, such as those in the section 1.2.1. which describes the agricultural “success stories” in Bihar.

- ABCD would actively involve the targeted local community in the design of development strategies, rather than designing programs based on problems apparent from analysis of broad social indicators and metrics. Local communities would help decide which problems they prioritized addressing; as a result, there might not be an agreement to focus on the same priorities and projects across communities on a regional or state scale.
- ABCD would have a primarily community-level focus instead of a regional or national focus.
- Instead of focusing first on the actions and funding of national, state and non-profit actors, the primary focus would be on community members and the assets they possess.