Building Communities Through Action Research for Social Change

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Purpose of Paper

- Review community strategies for survival and growth

- Review roles of CBOs and NGOs in communities

- Situate the Institute for Community Research as an NGO with community capacity building mission, experience and models

- Describe the ICR strategies for enhancing communities through action research partnerships

- Conclude with benefits of action research for social change

The Roles of NGOs and CBOs in Local Communities

- CBOs arise in local communities and are locally funded
- are perceived as locally situated and focused
- provide material needs
- organize political agendas
- serve human needs
- strengthen cultural identity
- advocate for or promote changes

- NGOs are "more than local"
- May work with, separately from or replace the public sector
- Have special interests
- Are change-oriented
- May be viewed with suspicion by local CBOs and residents
- Receive public national, international or foundation funding
- Bridge local and national /international interests

Local Communities, Neighborhoods and Networks

- **Communities include:**
  - A diverse group of residents
  - Religious institutions
  - Economic enterprises
  - Service Institutions (health, educational)
  - Infrastructure (transport, utilities etc.)
- **Communities are linked to local, national and global forces and resources**
- **Communities evolve and change in response to these dynamics**

Community Building Strategies used by CBOs and NGOs

- **Ensuring community survival under stress**
- **Promoting community cultural conservation and development**
- **Expanding community resource access**
- **Negotiating socio-political change**
- **Generating and using information and technology for local/global development**

How Community Research Builds Community Capacity

■ **Offers opportunities to access new information related to survival issues**

■ **Organizes people around a common set of questions and problems**

■ **Provides collaborative methods for assessing, analyzing, recording and re/co-constructing community, history, ritual, stories, artifacts and other components of cultural identity.**

■ **Enables identification of local ways of conceptualizing and defining problems, needs and resources**

■ **Offers an informed basis for critique, resistence and redefinition and political advocacy**

■ **Democratizes science and access to science technology**

The tools of research can help communities and organized groups of any age to further their control over social, cultural, economic and political futures…..

ICR: Capacity Building NGO

ICR is founded on critical social science principles and methods of collaborative action research. ICR forms research partnerships with communities to:

- conserve cultural heritage
- develop cultural resources
- improve educational and health access and quality of care
- develop strategies for short term and long term sociopolitical change
- Improve access to information resources and technology

ICR recognizes class, social race, ethnic, language, culture, history, economic and political power differentials. Capacity building is an effort to mediate or remove these general power differentials while addressing specific social problems, and strengthening specific social assets. ICR's capacity building orientation thus has implications for choice of partnership, issue, location, and methods.

ICR: Mission (1987- present)

To conduct research in collaboration with community partners for the promotion of justice and equity in a diverse, multicultural, multiethnic society.

As a Capacity Building NGO, ICR's mission engages community residents and CBOs in active involvement in research for personal, organizational and community education, development and change. ICR strategies include:

- Action Research Training for Change
- Building basic (formative) research partnerships
- Testing interventions (theory driven programs of social change)
- Conserving and presenting Cultures

Key Elements in the ICR Approach

- Long term commitment and field work in communities
- Identification of a range of partners within a community to avoid creating or enhancing divisions
- Respecting multiple perspectives
- Choosing a "workable" number of partners
- Avoiding very large coalitions

- Keeping residents' perspectives in the forefront
- Ensuring CBO and resident partnership in research
- Keeping research flexible, creative and rigorous
- Cost-sharing
- Hiring staff from partner communities
- Linking with scholar-activists and community scholars or cultural experts with shared values

STRATEGY 1: ICR Builds Capacity through Participatory Action Research for Social Change

Participatory Action Research promotes communities to engage in dialogue with ICR researchers over issues that affect both parties directly. Steps in the process involve:

- Identifying issues
- building local theory that explains the problem
- Identifying research methods
- organizing people and learning about issues through gathering data,
- analyzing the data together
- planning and evaluating joint action
- supporting local activists empowered by data and research networks

PAR Training Theory and Methods

■ **Theories: Empowerment, gender, social-learning social construction of knowledge, social ecology, critical theories, social influence, network.**

■ **Methods: Observation, interviewing, social, cognitive and GIS mapping, elicitation techniques, social network research, internet research, surveys**

■ **Tools: ANTHROPAC, SPSS, EZE-TEXT, EXCEL, POWERPOINT, Word processing, digital photography and printing software**

- **The Urban Women's Development Project 1989-92**
- **Rapid Socio-demographic Assessment Program (RSA)-1988-1992**
- **Socioeconomic Status of Men (1992-3)**
- **Alternative census documentation (1991)**
- **Resident Evaluation of Neighborhood Status (UANC) (1995-1997)**
- **Teen Action Research Project (1989-1994)**
- **Community Action Against Substance Abuse (1994-1997)**
- **Urban Women Against Substance Abuse (1994-1999)**
- **National Teen Action Research Center**
  - **Summer Youth Research Institute 1994 ongoing**
  - **Education and Advocacy Project - 2000-ongoing**
  - **Action Research for Service Learning Model**
  - **PAR goes to school: Bulkeley High School (2000-2002)**
  - **Sexual Minority Youth Project (1999-2002)**
- **Children' First Initiative (1998-2001)**

Teen Action Research results at public presentation

UWASA girl showing off her research based prevention tools

NTARC youth working on body Mapping

Teachers preparing action research curricula for middle school children

STRATEGY II: Basic (formative) Research Partnerships for Change

The AIDS Community Research Group (ACRG) 1988-89 (laying the foundation for the <u>C</u>ommunity <u>A</u>ction for <u>A</u>ids <u>P</u>revention Consortium).

CAAP Consortium: Basic Research to Direct Change in AIDS Prevention with drug users.

SAVA	What are the associations among drugs, violence and HIV?
SAVA	What is the association among drug use, violence against women and HIV risk?
NEP	How effective are needle exchange programs?

Exposure of Older Adults to HIV Infection (ICR, NCAAA, HHA, CHA, UIC and buildings) (1999-2003)

High Risk Sites (ICR/HHC/Yale drug users and gatekeepers) 1997-2001.

Pathways to High Risk Drug Use in Urban Youth (ICR-HHC and youth) 1998-2002.

Testing Microbicide Acceptablity among Women at High Risk of HIV Infection (ICR, HIV Action Initiative, Women) (2000-2003)

STRATEGY III: Intervention Research for Change
AIDS Prevention Research Partnerships

Cope I   Testing Culturally Appropriate AIDS Outreach and
                  Intervention (1990-1993)

Cope II   Testing standard versus enhanced interventions (1993-8)

Cope III   Did Outreach Intervention make a difference (1998-2001)

Connect I   Testing case management for drug users (1993-6)

Connect II   Testing case management for drug users (1999-02)

MAPP/PACE   Community AIDS prevention model (1993-ongoing)

RAP   Drug users as Public Health Advocates for HIV
                  prevention with peers (ICR-HHC and users) (2001-2005)

Intervention Research for Change:
Drugs and AIDS Prevention in Schools

- **AIDS Education as Social Problem Solving builds AIDS instructional capacity in middle schools, community agencies and peer educators 1997-2001**

- **Building Prevention Norms in Urban Middle Schools builds cooperative education instructional capacity and school wide change in middle schools 1999-2003**

- **An evaluation of the New Haven Safe Schools Program increases systemic capacity to serve students with social and emotional problems 1999-2002**

- **Encontrando el Poder Dentro de Ti builds parental advocacy and prevention capacity in a Latino early childhood center 1999-2001**

STRATEGY IV: Cultural Conservation and Resource Development
The Connecticut Cultural Heritage Arts Program

ICR's Connecticut Cultural Heritage Arts Program develops partnerships with ethnic and national communities in Connecticut and throughout the Northeast---- Cape Verdeans... African Americans... Puerto Ricans... Franco-Americans...Polish people…. Greeks….Irish…Italian….Tibetans. ...Peruvians...West Indians… Portuguese,…Chinese….Laotian….

.Cambodian ….Vietnamese……..

Indians...First Nation communities, woodworkers, fisherfamilies..

- Ongoing documentation
- Apprenticeships
- Workshops with cultural experts
- Recorded cultural debates with community and university scholars.
- Research based gallery performances, exhibits and talks
- Community cultural and arts archive
- Catalogues documenting community art, history and culture

STRATEGY IV: The Urban Artists' Initiative

Cities:

- Hartford
- New Haven
- Stamford
- Bridgeport
- Waterbury
- Bristol
- New Britain
- New London

UAI, a national model for supporting urban artists, builds partnerships with cities, local arts CBOs and culturally based artists. Begun in 1990, with NEA funding, the program identifies, promotes and documents the work of urban artistists in cities of the state underserved by arts funders and cultural policy makers.

Over 200 artists and CBOs representing at least 30 different ethnic and national groups have participated in the 3 year program cycle in eight cities.

UAI artists have formed alliances within and across cities, are performing and exhibiting in Connecticut and nationally and have changed the cultural landscape of the state. Individual artists and group work acts as a critical commentary on the quality of urban U.S. lifestyle.

Training...Linking...Mentoring... Promoting… …Presenting…Networking…Documenting.

ICR's Heritage and Community Gallery

ICR's Heritage and Community Gallery shows the work of Connecticut and Northeast Region artists, and hosts interactive public dialogues which feature community scholars and cultural experts on community perspectives on culture and current events.

The AIDS Altar

Tibetans in the Northeast

Southeast Asian Wedding Traditions

Taino Traditions

Living Legends

Franco-American Wood Carvers

Live performances of traditional music

"Focus on Four" (artists on the Capital City urban area)

Children's AIDS Poster Competition

UWASA girls model their future

ICR Koffee House

Latino Cabaret and booksigning

ICR's Heritage and Community Gallery

Exposition of Contemporary Taino Identity through Art, Language and Artifacts

Polonia in Connecticut

Tibetan Musicians at exhibit of traditional arts and bazaar

Somali Hay: Traditional Thai Temple Dancer

Research Based Public Programming

Conferences (National and local Panels)

Diversity in the Workforce (1988)

Restructuring (1990)

Children in Difficult Circumstances (1992)

Privatization: For the Common Good? (1996)

The Joe Zita Lecture Series: four national dialogues on community, culture, structural change and critical perspectives on early childhood development (2000)

UAI conferences (1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001)

Community HIV Forum, ongoing

Performances and Seminars

"A Hard Way Out", a youth-produced antiviolence video

Cape Verdean Music Festival

CHAP-Charter Oak Cultural Center Multicultural Multiethic Folkarts Performance Series (2 years)

Southeast Asian Dance Traditions (an interactive dance series)

Puerto Rican Traditional Arts Workshops (Cuatro, pandero, cake decoration, mundillo) for apprentices

Summer Youth Research Institute presentation and exhibit, 1995-ongoing

Building Community Capacity

- **Bonding**
  - **Forming youth-adult teams**
  - **Supporting cultural expression for reinforcement of ethnic identity**
  - **Solidifying relationships among artists by discipline, city and ethnicity**
  - **Linking residents and resources within neighborhoods**
  - **Rooting researchers and artists within disciplines**
  - **Building ethnic/culture specific interventions**

Building Community Capacity

- **Bridging**
  - crossing cultural, sexual preference, neighborhood, school, gender, ethnicity and age lines.
  - supporting cross-ethnic exhibits and performance, and the self-conscious fusion of cultural expression
  - solidifying relationships among artists and researchers by discipline, city and ethnicity
  - linking residents and resources across neighbourhoods, communities, states and countries
  - Holding public partnership events in community settings

Institute For Community Research

- Founded as ICR in 1987
- Based in Hartford CT with sites throughout Connecticut, and Chicago
- Now 50 full time staff, 10 part time adult staff, 23 youth research staff
- Multi-ethnic, multi-disciplinary, multi-lingual, multi-methods, multi-partners, multi-talented

Some Results

- Long term community research and action partnerships
- Increased research and planning capacity in community organizations
- More community researchers from communities "researched"
- More "open spaces" in a segregated society
- More venues for translational research (moving community research results into community settings for advocacy, action and prevention)
- Artists and organizations as cultural workers
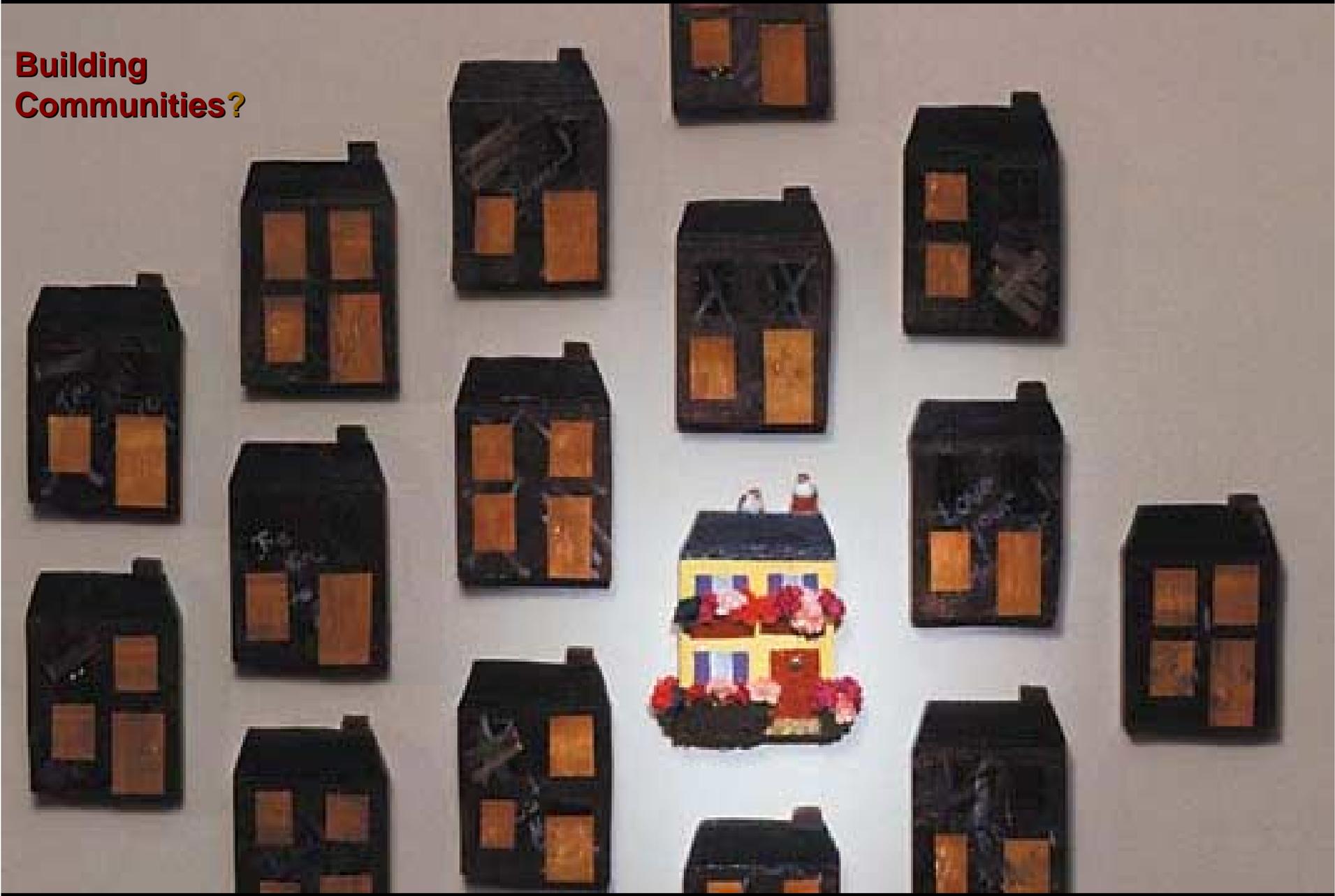- People moving from the margins to the center together

Summary

Partnering in research with local communities and groups, using interactive qualitative and quantitative ethnographic methods and engaging study partners and participants in representation, ICR strategies are fundamentally *anthropological.*

These strategies and programs offer models for other communities

ICR staff are now engaged in training partnerships to disseminate models and methods nationally and internationally

Building Communities?

Which Partners?

- From 2 - 80 Partners
- Service providers
- Research institutes
- CBOs, PVOs, NGOs
- informal community groups (PTAs etc.)
- Hospitals and Schools
- Local and State Agencies

- Public Housing
- Museums and cultural centers
- Universities
- Ethnic and National Groups
- Cities
- Funders
- The Media

Building Community through Action Research Partnerships and the Arts

- **Using research as a bridge to *build local community capacity* to secure social, biophysical, political and cultural health.**

- **Using social science research results with community and institutional partners to *highlight issues, promote solutions, inform policy and build community.***

- **Forming bridging partnerships with ethnic, cultural and national groups to *enhance visibility, preserve culture, and learn public representation*.**

- **Using the media to make *issues visible* and widely known.**