

# What exactly *is* capacity building?

## WHAT IS IT?

‘Capacity building’ means different things to different people. Sometimes it is used to describe social capital, but more typically it describes a series of processes of working with individuals and communities that helps to build up their abilities and structures. It is a tool used within community development\*.

## ISN'T IT JUST A MEANINGLESS JARGON PHRASE?

No... although admittedly in a world of complicated jargon, ‘capacity building’ seems to be one of the least-clearly understood! Really it is a catch-all way of describing a wide range of ways of working with people and groups. Sadly, because the phrase is not as widely understood as it could be, it sometimes ends up being more disempowering than empowering.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

‘Capacity building is one of the key tools of community development work. It is essential for the long term sustainability of organisations and communities. It can enable them to grow and flourish and become an essential part of the wider community. On an organisational level, successful capacity building can release the potential of an organisation to meet the demand from its local community.’<sup>5</sup>

## WHAT ARE SOME KEY DEFINITIONS?

The Faith-Based Regeneration Network UK uses a definition from the Community Development Foundation:

**CAPACITY BUILDING is ‘development work that strengthens the ability of community organisations and groups to build their structures, systems, people and skills so that they are better able to define and achieve their objectives and engage in consultation and planning, managing community projects, and take part in partnerships and community enterprises. It includes aspects of training, organisational and personal development, and resource building, organised in a planned and self conscious manner, reflecting the principles of empowerment and equality.’**

The Department for Communities and Local Government has described capacity building as ‘the capacity of the people in communities to participate in actions based on community interests, both as individuals and through groups, organisations and networks.’ The definition it uses is:

**CAPACITY BUILDING is ‘activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills and abilities of people and communities enabling them to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their communities.’**

It goes on to say that capacity building has three essential (and inter-dependent) elements:

