

The Philosophical Assumptions, Utility and Challenges of Asset Mapping Approaches to Community Engagement

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This literature review is a discussion of asset-based approaches to community engagement. Following a literature search, we identified several asset mapping approaches: Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD); Participatory Inquiry into Religious Health Assets, Networks and Agency (PIRHANA); Community Health Assets Mapping for Partnerships (CHAMP); the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA); Planning for Real®; and approaches using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). These approaches are framed by assumptions about ‘assets’, ‘needs’, and ‘community’ and their associated community engagement methods that may be influenced by dynamics related to conflict, competition and language. We conclude that asset mapping approaches derive their value from their capacities to support partnership building, consensus creation, and community agency and control.

Keywords: agency, asset mapping, community development, community engagement, participation

Community asset mapping, representing a specific form of community engagement, provides communities with an opportunity to mobilise existing strengths and resources. Community asset mapping is “a process of documenting the tangible and intangible resources of a community by viewing the community as a place with strengths or assets that need to be preserved and enhanced, not deficits to be remedied” (Kerka, 2003, p. 3). These resources may belong to an entire community, or they may be peculiar to individuals, groups or organisations within communities (Rossing, 2000).

Kramer, Seedat, Lazarus, and Suffla (2011) suggest that an asset-based approach represents an engagement attempt to re-conceptualise communities as being inherently resourceful, resilient and cohesive. Understood thus, asset-based approaches are particularly useful in providing low-to-middle income countries (LMICs) such as South Africa with opportunities for development through the identification, mobilisation and redistribution of skills and resources (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). Following the global index for human development, we recognise that development includes “the expansion of the substantive freedoms of people today while making reasonable efforts to avoid seriously compromising those of future generations” (United Nations Development Programme, 2011, p. 2). Sustainability and equity are key to the concept of development, and thus a central objective of community development is sustainable freedom for marginalised communities characterised by a lack of access to socio-economic opportunities, and inadequate health and welfare services. While asset-based approaches are most often focused on community development, the mobilisation of resources also serves to engender community participation, community agency and group inclusivity. Here, group inclusivity refers to the process whereby community members are able to cooperate and collaborate with each

other towards the development of their community despite potential individual interests and differences. This inclusivity is necessarily driven by communal trust and ability to reconcile intra-group conflict (Emmett, 2000).

Goals of the Review

We aim to identify, describe and examine a range of asset mapping approaches in order to ascertain ways in which asset-focused approaches as interventions could be used to promote community development through engagement. Second, our review aims to examine the participatory nature of asset-based approaches. Third, we aim to examine assumptions about ‘assets’, ‘needs’ and ‘community’ in asset mapping approaches. Our discussion is an attempt to demonstrate how asset mapping approaches, when utilised in purposeful and relevant ways, may strengthen community engagement in the form of research and action.

Method

Approach

We followed an earlier review by Kramer et al. (2011), who highlighted the importance of a variety of community-level assessments and their ability to provide a constructive developmental framework. That review, focused on measures of social capital, social cohesion, community resilience and sense of community, suggests that asset-based approaches offer tools to engage communities positively and constructively. Thus asset-based approaches represent a shift towards affirming community agency and ownership (Kramer et al., 2011). To this end we adopt the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR) and the Australian Council Policies and Strategies (2005) in order to critically discuss the participatory poten-

tial of asset mapping approaches. We also consider the influence of conflict, competition and language on community engagement. The case for a focus on assets should not assume that communities are totally free of competitive, conflictual and contesting tendencies. Such tendencies may be a part of the creative and transformative characteristics of communities. Likewise, language, as a mode of cultural transmission needs careful consideration, especially when translating concepts from English-centric approaches. In highlighting the issue of language, we also attempt to draw attention to power differentials evident in community engagement work.

Data Corpus

The data collection process involved a series of literature searches based on a combination of key words, including: *assets*, *asset mapping*, *community*, *development*, *participation*, *community resources* and *South Africa*. National and international articles were sourced through the Medical Research Council (MRC) intranet, and the African Religious Health Assets Programme (ARHAP), University of Cape Town (UCT) and Memphis websites. Articles were also sourced by means of the following search engines: EBSCO HOST, JSTOR, Science Direct, PubMed Central, Google, Google Scholar, and Springerlink. The searches were originally performed in the English language only for the period 2000 to 2010 in order to access the most recent research material. However, owing to the sparseness of the literature yield, the search period was extended to include the 1990s. Articles were included for review if they were relevant to the aims of our analysis, namely to source and describe community asset mapping approaches, and their associated participatory and underlying assumptions about 'assets', 'needs' and 'community'. Approaches that prioritise assets such as community cohesion and neighbourhood ties, or fulfilled some of the principles set out by CBPR and the Council Strategies and Policies (2005) or that focused on LMICs including South Africa were also included for review.

The research process elicited 45 articles focused on asset mapping. After a careful reading of these 45 articles we identified six explicit asset mapping approaches, namely, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), Participatory Inquiry into Religious Health Assets, Networks and Agency (PIRHANA), Community Health Assets Mapping for Partnerships (CHAMP), the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), Planning for Real®, and approaches using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). We critically review each of these six approaches against the criteria described below.

Review Criteria

A key characteristic of community asset mapping is its participatory nature. In this respect, the principles embedded in both CBPR and the Council Strategies and Policies (2005) offer succinct criteria against which to examine the participatory nature of asset mapping approaches. We adopted the Council Policies and Strategies (2005) because they offer a concise elaboration of the CBPR principles. CBPR is a partnership approach to research in that it involves community members, organisational representatives and researchers in all aspects of the research process equitably (Lazarus, Duran, Caldwell, & Bulbulia, 2012). Within CBPR, (a) genuine *partnership* means co-learning (academic and community partners learning from one another), (b) research efforts include *capacity building* (in addition to conducting the research, there is a commitment to training community members in research), (c) findings and

knowledge are intended to *benefit all* partners, and (d) there is *long-term commitment* to effectively reducing disparities (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). CBPR mobilises community members to work collaboratively in resolving community social and health issues through the activation and reorganisation of existing community resources (Kim-Ju et al., 2008).

The Council Strategies and Policies (2005) were developed by the Council that runs the city of Casey in Melbourne, Australia. The Council upholds a very particular ethos concerning community development in that it is focused on equity, participation, collaboration, sustainability and cross-cultural communications and relationships. The Council Strategies and Policies (2005) thus echoes the developmental goals put forward by the global index for human development and resonates with South African objectives to develop equitable statuses and relationships across culture, gender and ethnicity. The Council Strategies and Policies (2005), in harmony with CBPR principles, stresses inclusiveness, collaboration, capacity building, equity, responsiveness and empowerment. *Inclusiveness* provides the community with opportunities to meaningfully participate in information gathering, planning, direction-setting and decision-making regarding outcomes that affect a given community's development. The ultimate goal is to enhance community capacity to drive the community development process. *Collaboration* establishes and fosters partnerships that aim to achieve positive outcomes through building relationships and asset mobilisation for community development. This includes developing networks among people both within and across different communities. *Capacity building* supports and strengthens individuals, families and groups that consequently assist in the identification of needs and the development of solutions at a local level. Capacity building may take the form of education, awareness raising and the distribution of resources to individuals and groups in communities. *Equity* requires that opportunities and resources be distributed in a just and equitable manner to fulfil the needs of a particular community. *Responsiveness* is about remaining sensitive to the evolving and changing nature of issues and concerns. Such sensitivity helps ensure relevant, effective and efficient responses to community concerns. *Empowerment* promotes the ability of people and communities to actively manage or control their own lives. Empowerment is the result of a variety of community development strategies, including capacity building, community control and participation, all of which aim to activate sustainable community agency and ownership (Council Strategies and Policies, 2005). The establishment of empowerment initiatives within a community context mobilises individuals and groups to take responsibility for their issues and exert an influence over these issues, thus engendering both a personal and social commitment to and consciousness of a variety of individual, familial and community development goals (Tsey, 2009). In the context of a postcolonial country such as South Africa, empowerment also has a decolonising effect resulting from community development domains and processes such as democratic and appreciative inquiries, the use of social and cultural resources in individual and group identity construction, and the activation of community participation and collaboration (Sonn & Quayle, 2012). Empowerment is thus both the cause and effect of CBPR and Council Strategies and Policies (2005) standards such as inclusivity, equity and capacity building. However, empowerment ensures that these principles are not simply a function of community development, but rather that they are felt and experienced subjectively by individuals, groups and families within a given community.

The above-mentioned standards and principles were used as a guide to evaluate each approach as a potential and novel tool for South African and other LMIC community development initiatives. The outcome of our review and associated discussions that follow demonstrate both the utility of and the challenges involved in asset mapping as a form of community engagement in LMICs.

Logic, Strategies and Intentions: Identified Asset Mapping Approaches

The *Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)* approach was developed in the United States of America (USA) by community philosophers, John Kretzman and John L. McKnight, with the objective of overcoming community-level poverty. ABCD was inspired by those communities that had been able to mobilise their own resources for positive social and economic change (Mathie & Kearney, 2001). Diverging from a needs-based deficits approach to community development, the central aim of ABCD is to restore agency often lost to external development institutions such as government and non-government organisations (NGOs) (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008; Mathie & Kearney, 2001). ABCD encourages people to recognise that their community is a 'glass half full' of assets, rather than a 'glass half empty' with needs. Thus, the identification and consequent mobilisation of local assets forms the foundation for community opportunity creation. By being asset-based, internally-focused, and relationship-driven, this approach is successfully able to target a variety of recipients, including individual citizens, local voluntary associations and institutions, the local economy, and the environment (Green, Moore & O'Brien, 2006). The ABCD process also engenders group collaboration and encourages leadership and capacitation of community leaders.

Mathie and Kearney (2001) describe the ABCD approach as involving the mapping of assets within the community and thereafter finding ways to mobilise these assets through drawing on internal relationships and external connections. A popular educational technique, known as the 'leaky bucket', provides a useful framework for identifying the various categories of community assets and the possible economic opportunities for linking these assets. Specifically, the community is encouraged to find ways in which their money can stay within the bucket instead of leaking out. The primary means of activating assets at the community level involves teaching community members to spend their money on community development that will guarantee increased income. For example, a community might pool the incomes of a group of community members towards the development of a chicken coop. Thereafter the community is able to sell chickens and eggs to people outside of the community as well as feed the people within the community. This strategy encourages community members to spend less of their income on purchasing produce bought from outside of the community precincts. More important, the strategy simultaneously grows wealth through the informed use of financial income and food production (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008).

Notwithstanding its obvious strengths, the ABCD approach does not appear to deal explicitly with the role of external agencies and institutions in community development and power differentials and inequalities within communities. Also, ABCD does not provide any guidelines on how to foster sustainable community leadership.

Despite these challenges, ABCD has been successfully applied in Mapothostat, a rural region in South Africa character-

ised by poverty and unemployment. ABCD assisted Mapothostat in the development of its own resources (a chicken coop and a vegetable garden), which resulted in the production of food for the community as well as produce that ensured financial income from external sources (personal communication from community members in Mapothostat, Rustenburg, 2010).

The *Participatory Inquiry into Religious Health Assets, Networks and Agency (PIRHANA)* toolset was developed by the African Religious Health Assets Programme (ARHAP) in order to map and assess religious health assets in selected sites (e.g., Zambia, Lesotho, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, DRC, Malawi and South Africa in Africa as well as Memphis, Boston and Atlanta in the USA). ARHAP, recently renamed the International Religious Health Assets Programme (IRHAP), is an international collaboration, housed at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. In partnership with the Center of Excellence in Faith and Health, Methodist Lebonheur Healthcare in Memphis, IRHAP seeks to develop a systematic knowledge base for religious health assets, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In this context, religious assets refer to locally embedded religious images, values, practices, people and organisations, both tangible (e.g., a care-group, a clinic, a mosque) and intangible (e.g., compassion, local credibility) (ARHAP, 2006). The PIRHANA approach involves seven key elements which draw on factors related to health, healing and well-being in an African context. As appreciative inquiry, PIRHANA is rooted in the idea that participatory work involves 'handing over the stick', so that local people drive the inquiry and have ownership of the process. Qualitative and quantitative methods are used and provide various forms of transparent and democratic information. PIRHANA has demonstrated applicability in a variety of settings, both urban and rural. However, the developers of this approach argue that special care must always be taken to ensure translation and adaptation to the local context (ARHAP, 2006; de Gruchy et al., 2007), which is both a relevant and necessary requirement in the context of South Africa and other LMICs characterised by diversity. This method of asset mapping also gives rise to challenges relating to quantitative data collection and analysis, which has been identified as an area for further development (de Gruchy, Cochrane, Olivier, & Matimelo, 2011). The concept of religious assets also needs further research at the level of operationalisation, particularly in the case of intangible assets.

The *Community Health Assets Mapping for Partnerships (CHAMP)* toolkit is an adaptation of PIRHANA, also developed by ARHAP. CHAMP has been piloted in three South African locations in KwaZulu-Natal in response to HIV and AIDS related loss, suffering and pain (de Gruchy et al., 2009), as well as ten districts served by members of the Hospice Palliative Care Association of South Africa. Rather than limiting itself to religious health assets, CHAMP broadens its focus to include community health assets and existing community partnerships that can be further developed for the purposes of community well-being. CHAMP's central assumption is that any knowledge generated during the mapping process belongs primarily to the local community. The role of external agents is to make community members aware of the knowledge production process as well as to guide the process from a sufficient distance so that community leadership is able to emerge naturally. Above all, it aims to initiate a productive and durable alignment between local community health activities and health facilities through building partnerships (de Gruchy et al., 2009). This tool uses a similar logic to the one used in PIRHANA, and thus requires a structured approach to application. PIRHANA is marked by several chal-

lenges. The structured approach, while useful and important, does not allow for much flexibility at the level of application. The users of both the PIRHANA and CHAMP toolsets are also able, if they wish, to pick and choose elements from them, thus undermining or even destroying the critical logic that is at its core, namely, a systematic, carefully sequenced building of insight and knowledge in the process of using the toolsets.

The *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA)* grew out of a concern that poverty alleviation initiatives remained focused on financial income, often resulting in a narrow understanding of assets as purely monetary (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008). The SLA was initially conceptualised by the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development and thereafter expanded on by the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. This was in lieu of the broad objectives to eradicate global poverty and identify assets and resources beyond those characterised as financial income (Krantz, 2001). Proponents of 'sustainable livelihoods' recognise the need to take into account the vulnerability of impoverished people and to employ new strategies to deal with the circumstances in which vulnerabilities develop. The approach recommends that household assets should be mobilised to shape people's livelihoods (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008). These assets include human, financial, social, physical and natural assets, as well as broader community-level assets such as institutions, organisations, policies and legislation. The SLA is particularly powerful in its ability to restructure normative understandings of impoverishment by reframing ideas of livelihoods. According to the SLA, livelihoods are embedded within macro-level institutions impacted on by individual life choices, and enabled or constrained by contextual factors. In the SLA philosophy actions are: people-centred, participatory, sustainable, empowering, conducted in partnerships, multi-level, long-term and flexible (Toner, 2003). The SLA thus draws on a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods associated with poverty reduction (Jansen, Damon, Pender, Wielemaker & Schipper, 2003).

The SLA has had positive outcomes in at least two related interventions in Tanzania. However, this useful approach is criticised for simplifying complex contexts, which limits its applicability and sustainability (Toner, 2003). Meinzen-Dick and Adato (2001) have suggested that the SLA fails to deal with issues relating to cultural, language and ethnic differences, despite its claim that livelihoods are embedded in particular contexts. The SLA also does not allow for the incorporation of historical factors that may restrict community agency and empowerment in community development initiatives.

Planning for Real® is an approach developed in the United Kingdom by the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (2009). This approach engages communities through a process of consultation in order to develop action plans specific to participant communities. The process involves external agents and community members working together to build a three-dimensional model of the community context. Cards that specify both community needs and assets are placed in relevant areas on the map. The needs are classified as high, medium or low priority, and these categories then form the foundation for the action plan. Other creative exercises, such as the painting of self-portraits or 'self-maps' and the creation of flags or quilts, assist this process. Following the delineation of needs and assets, each community member participates in a skills survey that aims to identify local skills and in the development of an action plan (Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, 2009).

While *Planning for Real®* is extremely powerful in its visual, participatory and collaborative character, its application is highly dependent on specific sophisticated resources which are not always available in South Africa and other LMICs. The model also requires a vast amount of drawing, mapping and building material, which is often difficult to obtain in under-resourced communities. Nonetheless, the model is both dynamic and adaptable and these limitations can be overcome through creativity and appropriate translation. For example, the *Planning for Real®* approach has been applied successfully in both Gauteng and Western Cape South African communities, where it was combined with a participatory workshop that sought to identify particular meanings of 'community', 'needs', 'assets' and 'development' (personal communication from community members in Vlakfontein, Gauteng and Broadlands Park, Western Cape, 2010). The workshop assisted community members to use their communal space as a means to collaborate, share and identify common goals.

Another means of overcoming the resource-related challenges is to combine the *Planning for Real®* approach with Robert Chambers' participatory action learning, which was developed from participatory rural appraisal (PRA). Participatory action learning assumes that visual diagramming and asset mapping is an effective driver for the stimulation of community collaboration, participation and development. Given the LMIC focus of participatory action learning, the PRA approach utilises only objects already available in the community setting for three-dimensional asset maps. These objects may be as simple as seeds, leaves and stones accessible in the community environment (Chambers, 1994). Participatory action learning has successfully been used in South Africa in a number of contexts. For example, Bozalek (2011) has used the method to explore instances of privilege versus marginalisation across higher education institutions in South Africa. The findings of this study highlighted how participatory action learning could engender co-learning and collaboration as well as assist in asset identification without the use of unnecessarily sophisticated resources (Bozalek, 2011). It would therefore appear that combining *Planning for Real®* with participatory modalities that engage community members in critical and practical ways overcomes some of the research-related limitations.

Finally, *Geographic Information Systems (GIS)* is a robust approach that, with the advance of technology, has gradually developed across and within many parts of the world. GIS is used in a variety of ways in different disciplines and professions. However, its relevance here is its use in community asset mapping and community development processes. GIS applications map information and data relative to geography or location and analyse data in different spatial contexts. GIS combines location data with both quantitative and qualitative information, allowing one to visualise, analyse and report information through maps and charts (ESRI, 2010). Data viewed on a map, as opposed to a listing or tabular format, are easier to understand and interpret. This visual character is particularly significant for a South African context, where language barriers often distract from community development objectives. In terms of assets, GIS can be used to identify the number of assets which exist in a neighbourhood. For example, libraries, parks, grocery stores, clubs, religious institutions and schools can all be mapped (Schlossberg, n.d.) and thereafter mobilised and drawn on for community development purposes.

GIS is particularly useful when used within a participatory framework (e.g., through PIRHANA and CHAMP) (de Gruchy, 2007). This is known as Participatory GIS (P-GIS) and aims to

integrate local knowledge with the information supplied by the GIS system to produce development and action plans (Quan, Oudwater, Pender, & Martin, 2001). However, most proponents of GIS do not take into account that the benefits of GIS may be reduced significantly in particular under-resourced contexts that are characterised by the lack of access to technology, the unavailability of skilled users, and limited access to GIS software resources required to analyse the data.

Critical Reflections and Participatory Criteria

When we consider these approaches against the principles of CBPR standards and the Australian Council Strategies and Policies (2005), we note that the approaches meet the criteria of: inclusiveness and co-learning, collaboration, capacity building, equity, responsiveness, sustainability and empowerment. Tables 1 and 2 summarise how each approach meets these criteria.

Each of the aforementioned approaches focuses on mapping and/or mobilising geographically identifiable resources (de Gruchy et al., 2007; Doan et al., 2008; Mathie & Cunningham, 2008; Schwabe, n.d.) for the purposes of fostering positive social, economic and ecological change at the community level (Serrat, 2010), thus fulfilling the CBPR objective of a long-term commitment to reducing disparities. Other than the SLA and GIS, all of the approaches emphasise community agency

(Mathie & Cunningham, 2008; Mathie & Kearney, 2001), relationship-building within and across communities, partnerships with government (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003, 2008), community participation and empowerment as well as community ownership. For example, the PIRHANA approach constructs community members as agents capable of shaping their own contexts with the use of appropriate and available resources. Likewise, the Planning for Real® model views community members as 'experts' and assumes that the role of external agents is to act as 'learners' within the community engagement process (Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, 2009).

Most of the approaches examined in this review also promote collaboration and sharing through the use of participatory techniques such as mapping and critical group discussions. This participatory feature is directly linked to empowerment, in that collaboration and the sharing of ideas are the means for fostering skills, abilities and knowledge at community level (Mason, McNulty & Aubel, 2001). Methodologically, the identified approaches use workshops and interactive exercises to collect qualitative and/or quantitative data. The interactive exercises are meant to be transparent, democratic, interpretive, appreciative and empowering (ARHAP, 2006; de Gruchy et al., 2007, 2009; ESRI, 2010; Jansen et al., 2003).

Table 1

CBPR Criteria and Asset Mapping Approaches

Approaches	CBPR Criteria			
	Co-learning through partnerships	Capacity building	Findings benefit all partners	Long-term commitment to reducing disparities
ABCD	√	√	√	√
PIRHANA	√	√	√	√
CHAMP	√	√	√	√
SLA	X	√	√	√
PLANNING FOR REAL®	√	√	√	√
GIS	X	X	√	√

Note. √ = criteria present; X = criteria absent

Table 2

The Council Strategies and Policies (2005) Criteria and Asset Mapping Approaches

Approaches	The Council Strategies and Policies (2005) Criteria					
	Inclusiveness	Collaboration	Capacity building	Equity	Responsiveness	Empowerment
ABCD	√	√	√	√	√	√
PIRHANA	√	√	√	√	√	√
CHAMP	√	√	√	√	√	√
SLA	X	X	√	√	X	X
PLANNING FOR REAL®	√	√	√	√	√	√
GIS	X	X	X	√	X	X

Note. √ = criteria present; X = criteria absent

As revealed by Tables 1 and 2, most of the approaches draw on objectives, methodologies and practices that enhance instances of capacity building, agency and empowerment. For example, the PIRHANA approach takes seriously the fact that people are 'actors' and can drive the inquiry by taking ownership of the process (de Gruchy et al., 2007). The SLA methodology also positions community members as the agents of their own development (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). For ABCD, working together and building relationships through partnerships is paramount to community development (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008). Likewise, CHAMP promotes the development of existing partnerships through participatory engagement as a means to create positive change (de Gruchy et al., 2009), thus realising the collaboration principle. The equity principle is emphasised by the SLA that seeks to move beyond the conventional approaches of poverty eradication by enhancing poor people's abilities to make a living in an economically, ecologically, and socially adaptive manner (Serrat, 2010). Likewise, the Planning for Real® model upholds the responsiveness principle in its aim to develop short-term, medium-term and long-term action plans according to the self-identified priorities of a given community.

In the section below we continue our critical analysis by examining the logic of asset mapping and assumptions of 'community' contained in the asset mapping approaches. We also draw attention to matters related to community needs and the influences of conflict, competition and language on community engagement.

The Logic of Asset Mapping and Community Needs

A primary objective of all the asset mapping approaches, reviewed in this article, is to reframe community members' perspectives concerning their contexts and developmental priorities. All the approaches seek to facilitate a shift from a needs-based or deficits outlook to a positive, resource-based one. Each of the approaches adopts different technologies and strategies to encourage an asset-based focus in community development. For instance, the GIS methodology brings together and charts assets on a map, making the assets easier to understand, interpret and communicate to others through visual representation (Schlossberg, n.d.). ABCD identifies strengths through examples of previous community asset mobilisation. By having their attention drawn to previous examples of asset mobilisation, community members are alerted to positive and sustainable strategies to alleviate contemporary concerns (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008). Similarly, the PIRHANA and CHAMP asset-based approaches to community development emphasise the identification of 'best practices' and are therefore capacity-focused (ARHAP, 2006; de Gruchy et al., 2007).

While the value of the assets perspective has been demonstrated repeatedly, we caution against reading this perspective as an exclusion of needs. We therefore concur with Lazarus (2003), who highlights the danger of dichotomising 'needs' and 'assets'. Locating 'needs' and 'assets' on opposite ends of a continuum represents a failure to recognise the dialectical linkages between the two. Assets obtain significance in the context of needs and challenges; likewise 'needs' are rendered meaningful in the search for assets. In this sense we agree with Sharpe, Greaney, Lee, and Royce (2000, p. 210), who have pointed out that "giving attention to assets is not the same as ignoring problems". Rather, it is about adopting a generative approach that mobilises existing community resources to address needs and challenges, discourses and practices, referred to as the 'politics of needs' by Fraser (1989), that prevents communi-

ties from recognising and using their assets. Thus while asset-oriented development workers are cautioned against ignoring 'needs', it is equally important to be mindful of the discourses and politics inherent in the focus on 'needs'. An inordinate focus on 'needs' may keep communities locked in a victim mode that curtails meaningful activism (see Fraser, 1989).

Assumptions about Community

The identified asset mapping approaches are underwritten by specific assumptions concerning 'community' which may mask the significance of conflict, competition and language. All of the approaches assume community to be a geographical entity that houses a group of like-minded individuals who share values, norms and a desire for generative development. While this understanding of community may be true in many respects, the asset approaches fail to consider the complex dynamics in community spaces often marked by competition for scarce resources, leadership conflicts and belligerent struggles for voice and representation. For example, the identification of community assets may inadvertently provoke conflict, especially if these resources are scarce and linked to survival. Additionally, community self-definition is a complex process and so does not necessarily encompass uniform identities or geographical location (Homan, 2004; Vaisey, 2007).

We suggest that communities are marked by both participatory, collaborative and consensus-building forces *and* competitive and conflict-driven tendencies, especially where there may be a struggle for scarce resources, representation and voice. Asset mapping approaches must therefore recognise the dialectical connections between generative forces and self-serving interests in communities, be they geographically or sociologically constructed. Asset-based community engagement should consider how conflict and contest may undermine generative forms of development.

Language Implications

Asset mapping approaches also fail to consider the significance of language in multilingual societies such as South Africa, where 11 languages are officially recognised. All the asset mapping approaches reviewed are English-centric, and in consequence in a multilingual context the precise meanings of words may be lost in translation. For instance, words and terms such as 'participation', 'engagement' and 'collaboration' may not find precise equivalents across languages, which may render these words and terms problematic. In raising the issue of language, we are not suggesting that 'participation', 'collaboration' and 'engagement' are irrelevant for other-than-English-speaking communities. Instead we are pointing to a need for greater sensitivity to how such terms find cultural articulation across different linguistic groups. This issue also raises challenges for when parties to a community engagement process do not share a common language for communication and interrogation of key concepts. In our experiences in South Africa, English assumes a high level of dominance.

While asset-based approaches reflect an appreciation for community-driven development, they nevertheless fail to reflect on the influences of power differentials arising from the dominance of English speaking experts and the use of English-centric approaches (Homan, 2004; Potter & Kruger, 2003). This is particularly problematic in LMICs such as South Africa that are already characterised by socio-economic disparities and unequal power relations. Thus, following Kramer et al. (2011), we suggest that asset-based approaches place particu-

lar emphasis on affirming a given community's perspective, language and voice alongside a reflexivity of the potential power dynamics that may arise in the process of implementation. Asset-oriented professionals need to find ways of being constantly reflective about the language-related challenges associated with developing genuine partnerships with communities.

Concluding Thoughts

This article identifies, describes and examines a range of asset mapping approaches in order to understand ways in which these approaches and associated methodologies may be used to support community engagement for the purposes of development. We reviewed the following community asset mapping methodologies: Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD); Participatory Inquiry into Religious Health Assets, Networks and Agency (PIRHANA); Community Health Assets Mapping for Partnerships (CHAMP); the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA); Planning for Real®; and approaches using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Our review was informed by assertions made by Mathie and Cunningham (2003), Kramer et al. (2011) as well as Ahmed, Seedat, Van Niekerk, and Bulbulia (2004) that asset-based approaches represent an opportunity to re-conceptualise communities as constructive and potentially rich resource-based contexts.

When we examined the asset-based approaches against the principles of CBPR and their elaboration in the Australian Council Strategies and Policies (2005), they all construct community engagement as a long-term participatory process that fosters partnerships, consensus, co-learning and mutual benefits among partners, inclusivity, capacitation and empowerment. Empowerment is obviously a contested and problematic term in so far as it assumes that the 'power' to act can be transferred from the haves to have-nots by way of training, capacitation and advocacy exercises. However, within asset mapping approaches, the focus seems to be on identifying and activating the community's inherent self-defining management and ownership capacities. Asset mapping seems to suggest working alongside communities to activate agency as a form of empowerment. The empowerment potential gains significance when we consider the lessons drawn from their applications in South Africa, embodying a range of low-income communities. For instance, the ABCD asset mapping intervention that took place in Mapothostat in Rustenburg in South Africa is best known for its achievement in activating community leadership and social control. Prior to the intervention, this rural community was characterised by high rates of unemployment, impoverishment and internal community conflict. The ABCD intervention targeted these issues by guiding community members in the identification and mobilisation of previously indiscernible community and human resources. The activation of these resources enabled community members to develop a food garden and a chicken coop, thus providing them with employment opportunities, a food source and increased income. More significantly, the intervention produced clear instances of community leadership and management, resulting in an enhanced sense of community ownership, cohesion and empowerment (personal communication from community members in Mapothostat, Rustenburg, 2010).

While we value the conceptual and methodological shifts towards generative development contained in asset mapping as engagement, we also use the review to try to highlight the dialectical links between 'assets' and 'needs', 'consensus' and 'conflict', and democratic partnerships and unequal power rela-

tions within community development. In conclusion, we therefore suggest that asset-based approaches should be sensitive to the dialectical tensions evident in communities so as to ensure context specificity, grow beneficial partnerships, facilitate co-learning, encourage resource sharing and promote empowerment in the form of activating agency and capacities for community-driven development.

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