

Conference report / Participation, power and progress:  
Community development towards 2030 – our analysis,  
our actions, World Community Development Conference,  
Maynooth, Ireland, June 25–27, 2018

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This publication may be cited as: Stansfield, J. (2018).  
Participation, power and progress: Community development  
towards 2030 – our analysis, our actions, World Community  
Development Conference, Maynooth, Ireland, June 25-  
27, 2018, *Whanake: The Pacific Journal of Community  
Development*, 4(2), 116–121.

Founded at Unitec Institute of Technology in 2015

An ePress publication

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# Conference report

## Participation, power and progress: Community development towards 2030 – our analysis, our actions

### World Community Development Conference, Maynooth, Ireland, June 25-27, 2018

JOHN M. STANSFIELD

The conference was a collaboration between Community Work Ireland, CWI, the International Association for Community Development, IACD, and the Department of Social Studies Maynooth University (<http://www.wcdc2018.ie>). The setting was the spectacular Maynooth University campus set in historic Maynooth town, Ireland's only university town, in County Kildare.

The conference organisers had done a splendid job of assembling participants from around the world, and more than 300 of us gathered for the opening plenary which was introduced in song. Music, both traditional and modern, was a uniting theme throughout the conference, in the sessions and well into the night. Anastasia Crickley, my fellow IACD VP and chair of CWI, welcomed delegates to the conference before handing over to former Irish Prime Minister Mary Robinson, who addressed the agenda for sustainable development being carried out by her own Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice.

In keeping with the international reach of the conference, an international panel presented perspectives from across the globe. This included Anita Paul, whom readers may have met at the IACD conference in Auckland 2017, who updated delegates about the work and challenges of the pan-Himalayan grassroots development foundation in India. Peter Westoby, allegedly from Australia, but to look at his passport from most of the world, brought a very human-in-values-centred approach to the discussion. My colleague from

Nigeria, Mohammad Bello Shito, who has done tremendous work in raising the profile of IACD and promoting community development research and training in Africa, was, along with Ronnie Fay of Ireland, a discussant for the panel.

The issues of human rights and social justice were very strongly presented throughout the conference; in particular the plight of the Rohingya refugees was presented in a very powerful exhibition launched at the university library. Contemporary issues in the sphere of human rights and social justice were also addressed with sessions looking at the rise of right-wing populism, or malignant populism as Peter Westoby would have it, as well as climate justice and the plight of the Irish Travellers community.

As well as paper presentations there was a good range of posters from around the world and some very useful workshops. I attended a workshop on the 'Dilemmas Café', a method of exploring ethical and political challenges in community development, and I certainly hope to work it into my teaching next year. I also participated in a very powerful workshop utilising John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, which I will certainly be adding to my toolbox.

I had the opportunity to present my own work under the title 'Biting the Hand that Feeds Us', a fresh look at grant-making and grant-seeker relationships, and to receive some very useful feedback from my peers around the world. Fellow Kiwi Christy Trewartha presented work from her PhD on measuring community mobilisation. And my energetic colleague Holly Scheib presented her work on capacity building in research from southern Somalia.

Born as I was in the 1950s, the troubles in Northern Ireland were an issue of great interest for me as a young man. Like many of my generation I was enthralled by the young firebrand Irish politician Bernadette Devlin, now McAliskey, and it was an absolute thrill to hear her address the conference. Bernadette, shot 14 times for her trouble, is an extraordinarily powerful orator who held the conference in her hands as she so very gently but firmly declared, "in an age of inequality, if you're going to talk about democracy, then you must talk about democratising wealth". It was a fabulous and well timed challenge to community development and the broader social services.

Australian academic and writer Jim Ife, who will be known to many, made a powerful address posing not just the challenges of sustainability but the paths and the voices which must be heeded. He was joined by Francisco Cali Tzay, a global Indigenous peoples leader from Guatemala. Francisco did a terrific job of joining up Indigenous struggles from around the world and explaining how these had influenced both the thinking and practice of Indigenous activism. He included references to Indigenous groups from New Zealand, Australia and the Americas.

Conferences are of course more than learning sessions, workshops and posters – they are an opportunity to engage with our colleagues from around the world. It was a great pleasure for me to reunite with fellow executive members from the IACD, with former contributors to this journal, and with participants in the 2017 IACD conference held in Auckland, such as James Calvin. There were also some fabulous young people at the conference, a particularly strong delegation from Hong Kong and several young PhD students from around the world including a lone but by no means quiet delegate from Mongolia.

Well it was Ireland – the hospitality was fabulous, and the singing went on

all night. Hats off to the organising committee of a very successful conference – they have certainly set a standard. Next year's IACD conference will be held in Dundee, Scotland: see the advertisement later in this journal.









