

Editorial

Managing conflict through community development

The JSDA and the Community Development Journal have both featured special issues previously on the question of conflict, refugees and civil disorder. With this issue, we return to the question of conflict in local communities and between nations, and the place that community development has in preventing conflict, managing it when it occurs and ameliorating its consequences.

In May 1997, the International Association for Community Development held its biennial colloquium in Pretoria, South Africa, on the highly appropriate theme of *"conflict management and peace-building through community development."* Although the majority of delegates attending the conference were from South Africa itself, searching for ways to use community development as a tool for reconciliation and nation-building, there were also many delegates from other parts of the world drawn to discuss their own experience of conflict management within very different national contexts. The CDJ and the Journal of Social Development in Africa, were invited to organise an afternoon panel discussion on the theme of the conference and some of the papers included within this CDJ/JSDA Special Issue were first presented as part of that panel. The author of one further paper, from Afghanistan, was prevented from attending by precisely the issue on which the conference focused: the impact of local conflicts. The remaining papers and case studies in this special issue are based on presentations made by participants at the conference, in some cases revised for publication after the conference.

The JSDA and CDJ have sought ways of collaborating over the past few years which would be of benefit to both our readerships and this represents another such collaboration. The total pool of papers made available after the conference have formed the basis for parallel special issues of each Journal, published as close together in time as respective publication cycles will allow. Some papers appear in both special issues, some (for reasons of space or for local considerations) in one journal only. However, the parallel publication venture indicates both the importance each journal attaches to the substantive issues discussed in the papers, and also the collaborative approach which each journal is keen to foster and will continue to do so. This is a joint editorial and the editors in particular wish to thank those participants who quickly provided revised versions of their papers and case studies, often in difficult circumstances, to enable us to produce these issues very rapidly.

The CDJ last produced a special issue on conflict in communities four years ago, while the JSDA produced a special issue on conflict and refugees five years ago. Neither journal makes an apology for returning to the question so soon. In one

week in 1996, thirty-seven civil wars and five cross-border conflicts were being fought. Conflict is becoming a "fact of life" for increasing numbers of communities and, as pressure on the world's resources grows, is likely to become more so. It is therefore an increasingly urgent task to examine the role that community development, based on values of co-operation, on democratic involvement and on a needs-led approach to working with people, can play in addressing the growth of conflict.

The CDJ panel set the context for exploring such an approach to working with conflict. Conflicts within and between communities can be conceptualised (and typically *are* conceptualised within the dominant development paradigm) in relatively limited ways, as problems which need to be managed. Within this dominant development paradigm, focusing as it does upon the promotion of market-led development, on a global scale, conflicts may be viewed, then, in terms of their potentially disruptive effects on development. From this perspective, community conflicts need to be contained. Otherwise, investment may be discouraged in the local context – not to mention the additional risk that conflicts may spill over into neighbouring areas and beyond.

The CDJ panel fully recognised the importance of working to manage and contain divisive conflicts within and between communities, where these conflicts were damaging the development process. But the panel went on to raise a series of further questions about the importance of analysing the structural reasons for such communal divisions. Community conflicts could be and all too often were indicatives of deeper underlying causes. Community conflicts may be symptomatic of long-standing structural inequalities and oppression (as in the case of community conflicts in Northern Ireland, the local UK example which was explored in the previous CDJ special issue). Conflict and violence may be the result of state policies to contain opposition (as the article on Zimbabwe in this issue demonstrates). And community conflicts may be caused and/or exacerbated by external interventions, as in the case of British, Russian and more recently American interventions in Afghanistan. In the current development context, the economic, political and ideological interests of these external forces become more relevant than ever.

The JSDA Board also recognised the value of this collaboration with CDJ and considered the topic of conflict resolution to be of such relevance to the African context that a special issue should again be devoted to it. The many-faceted structural roots of conflict are well-known within Africa and the legacy of colonialism, marginalisation, exploitation and underdevelopment of the continent are testimony to this.

From this alternative perspective, the question cannot simply be how to manage and contain community conflicts. On the contrary, community conflicts neither can nor should be effectively resolved, without addressing the underlying structural factors, as well as the presenting causes. Community development has a vital role to play here, empowering individuals and communities to analyse the roots as well as the immediate symptoms of their differences, promoting critical consciousness (or "conscientisation" to use Freire's terminology) to enable communities to develop their own strategies within a more transformative development paradigm. In contrast with the dominant, market-led development paradigm, this transformative model rests upon alternative values – values which have particular relevance for community development – emphasising needs-based approaches to development, aimed at promoting solidarity and social justice.

The CDJ panel also raised questions about the potential implications for the role of the journal itself. As an international forum, over more than thirty years, CDJ has provided the space to exchange experiences and to reflect upon these experiences critically, across national boundaries and between NGOs in First and Third Worlds, in both North and South. This special issue provides a range of such reflections, from the specific experiences of particular community-based projects to manage conflicts and build peace, through to the experiences of community-based initiatives to heal the wounds of violence and trauma. Correspondingly the JSDA, with twelve years focusing on social development and social work within Africa, is particularly interested in exploring critical areas relating to peace, development and community participation.

In addition, too, this special issue raises further questions about the role of international journals such as the CDJ and JSDA, in stimulating debate about the global dimensions of conflicts within and between communities. A number of the articles raise questions about the types of external factors which can cause and/or exacerbate community conflicts. And between them, the articles raise questions about the wider failures to manage, let alone to resolve, community conflicts. As the article from Rwanda reflected, it was, *"with great difficulty that we forgive the international community for remaining silent and turning a blind eye to the genocide which threw Rwanda into mourning. But we blame it more for not having helped us to reconstruct our country."* Lasting peace, this article argues, requires taking care of the victims, the widows and orphans lacking food and shelter, whilst tackling the underlying structural causes of past conflicts, working for development based upon social justice.