

## Dear Reader

This ARVAC bulletin is both unusually slim and unusually late. I mentioned before that I shall not shy away from uncomfortable truths and certainly shall not avoid the uncomfortable question, why.

It is, in my view, a sign of the times that friends and supporters of ARVAC, in this case planned contributors, find themselves having to prioritise under many pressures, and clearly having to give priority to sheer organisational survival. Their capacity to collaborate, to inform each other and to share, is coming under ever increasing pressure. All the more sincere thanks therefore to the contributors in this bulletin who have managed to find the time. It is clearly not the lack of things to share, in fact, we see increasing demands on and opportunities for ARVAC, which we often cannot respond to, simply for shortage of helping hands.

For ARVAC, an organisation depending exclusively on the willingness and ability of its supporters to spend some of their hard-pressed time on building and maintaining our community, this is an uncomfortable position, but we do not fear to acknowledge it publicly. And we respond to it.

I am delighted to point you to page 8 which contains the details of a major partnership programme of events about Community Participation in Research. Our close collaboration with other institutions enables us to generate knowledge and to contribute to debates and to make all this available for free. I am very grateful to all those institutions working with us, but in the week when the University of East Anglia was voted in a Times Higher Education survey to be the place offering the best student experience, I am particularly pleased to congratulate them as one of our closest partners. They have shown themselves to be a good friend to ARVAC, and you know what they say about friends in need.

It has been 6 years since, in May 2007, I edited our emergency bulletin explaining that "*Without our members our vision may not be sustained and eventually our work might seize and the voice we provided for many years may fall silent.*" and I urged you then not to let this happen. And you didn't let it happen.

ARVAC's needs today are different. We keep the same vision and now we again have the means to support our community by providing a voice. Yet, we remain severely restricted, needing more hands on deck. To better support our community and provide a stronger voice we need to work closely with those who can strengthen our friends and supporters especially those who in these difficult times can't engage. This time I urge you to lend a hand if you can.

**Jurgen Grotz (editor)**

## Inside this issue:

**Sarah Menzies** 2  
shares her experiences from Community Research.

**Matthew Scott** 4  
shares his views on Community Action.

**Simone Galimberti** 6  
suggests mainstreaming volunteerism into the local development agenda.

**INVITATION** 8  
**ARVAC ANNUAL LECTURE AND SEMINAR SERIES**

**Jinimi Cricket says** 9  
"Answer the question"

## Community Research: a powerful tool for new communities

**Sarah Menzies**

The Evelyn Oldfield Unit is an independent, membership-based, charitable organisation support agency for refugee and migrant community organisations and individuals. We run innovative projects designed to support the UK's newer communities through self-help in order to increase their capacity and potential for meeting the needs of their communities.

This is the fourth year of our community research and advocacy project. The genesis of the project was our own initial research which found that due to the fast changing make-up of London, the hyper-mobility of its boroughs and the changing needs of the community, there was an urgent need for further research. For some of the communities, needs have changed from the most basic, e.g. finding homes, gaining status, and rudimentary care to those of tackling poverty, exclusion and integration. There are also many gaps in existing research about some newer communities whose needs are under the radar. Evidencing those needs through community research was widely supported by our funders who also felt that conducting research was a core skill needed by the sector (Trust for London and the Big Lottery).

In the last two programmes, therefore, we decided that accreditation would help to motivate those involved, not only to see the project through but to have their hard work of conducting research rewarded by a qualification (Open College Network Level 3).

In the first accredited programme, we collaborated with the Africa Educational Trust, funded by the City Bridge Trust and as a result were able to offer 33 places. This 14-month programme involved modules on research, advocacy and presentation skills. The students, from around the

globe, were all of migrant and refugee background. We felt it important to give them a free reign on their research topic with the only criteria that that it would benefit their community. Key topics included:

- Skin bleaching in the African and Afro-Caribbean community
- Mental health as a taboo amongst new communities
- The impact on integration and mental health of mothering from a distance
- The construction of identity amongst the second generation
- Social enterprise as a tool for re-generating HIV positive men
- Domestic workers contribution to the UK's economy

For an overview of these reports and others of similarly fascinating topics, please see:

[http://www.evelynoldfield.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=6&Itemid=21](http://www.evelynoldfield.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6&Itemid=21)

22 students submitted and passed the research modules.

The next step was an advocacy module where we facilitated the students to take action based on their findings. This included learning how to lobby, to campaign and assert influence with their research findings. This culminated in a conference with Jeremy Corby MP and Councillor Kaseki (the UK's first Congolese councillor) as keynote speakers and over 100 delegates representing funders, statutory agencies, academics and other interested parties. Ten of the students made presentations.

The evaluation of the whole programme shows significant outcomes, such as students going onto find employment, new charities being set up, more funding, ongoing campaigning work and further research projects. One of the most important is the new knowledge generated; information to help understand the situation of new communities in London. This will have wide resonance across the sector. We are also displaying the reports at the London Met University and have them listed on the EOU website where many of the reports have had hundreds of hits since November 2012.

The students themselves have said how transformative they found attending the course; how it had increased their own value of self-worth. They have made new contacts, networks and a number of collaborations have arisen out of the project; the power of these softer outcomes should not be underestimated.

Overall, as a practitioner, I would say that running this course has had many moments of joy but also there were many challenges inherent in the process. This was the first time I had set up, designed, delivered and evaluated an accredited course. The learning of this was quite a curve. Seeing the students' hard work paying off and translated into successful projects is a sufficient reward for all of this.

Many of the students had complex lives; some suffered depression, many were out of work and the students faced a number of personal difficulties. Ensuring the written English was a sufficiently high level was a challenge; often the students had great ideas, good spoken English but writing a 5,000 report proved too challenging. We did offer other submission alternatives but these particular students did not take us up on this offer. This was assuaged somewhat by the mentoring scheme (an additional feature of the course mentioned below). The formality of the learning was a challenge for some who were not used to studying in the UK.

Some had poor attendance rates. Some needed support just to structure their study.

This is now the second year of offering an accredited course. We have built on the learning of the last programme. One of the most significant changes is that we have introduced a course ethical panel. On previous courses, it was up to the tutor and the partner agency to sign off the students' research phase as safe. We felt this now needed a more independent approach. We also introduced more teaching on how to write a report and studying skills. This course is smaller which has enabled more one to one time and student development. We kept many of the features however, including the co-presenter element. This involved invited guests coming in to speak on particular research topics including academics, research agencies, ARVAC, councillors, and leaders of refugee and migrant organisations (including several ex-students). The project also benefitted from a mentor programme whereby participants were given an external person to help them throughout the process. This was a very beneficial aspect of the course. We have learned a great deal in running these courses. We are keen to share our lessons and to keep the findings of our evaluation alive. If you know of any conferences or events we, including the students, could present at, please do get in touch.

For further details, comments or to offer support or ideas, please contact Sarah Menzies, project lead from the EOU on [sarah@evelynoldfield.co.uk](mailto:sarah@evelynoldfield.co.uk) or on 0207 697 4102 <http://www.evelynoldfield.co.uk/>

**Sarah Menzies is a Development Worker at the Evelyn Oldfield Unit. (for more information about her see also issue 118 of the bulletin, page 9.**

## Reconnecting with community action

**Matthew Scott**

Paulo Freire outlined three types of thinking which can be applied to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and the place it occupies within a wider UK political economy: magical, naive and critical thinking. An example of the first two forms might be that we are 'all in it together' (magical thinking) and that it follows that we can influence government to adopt our agenda (naive thinking). The third form of thinking, critical thinking, is attempted in this article. What follows is my reflection on the place the UK VCS has washed up on, and suggested actions that arise from this state of affairs.

Freire described a journey from submerged oppression typified by a culture of silence to a radical egalitarian vision of humanity transforming itself through the unfolding discovery of an endlessly creative and fulfilling shared reality; which is to say he figured out a way of turning the world upside down and making it a better place. Such optimistic idealism is in short supply today as the cuts bite and yet a sense of alternatives is what is most needed. We need to believe, as never before, that another world and within it, another VCS is possible; that the VCS does not have to be part of the drift towards every greater privatisation of public services simply because that is where the money leads it.

Different thinking can generate different results and different destinies.

Like the Greeks 2,500 years ago, Freire latched onto the power of praxis, of reflection and action, first think then do. The debate within the VCS is more often silent, submerged and viciously circular; it is a non-debate framed by government, specifically the market state, which drives the values and norms of the market ever further into every aspect of our lives. What Freire captured was that if you don't do your own thinking someone will do it for you and thereby set the terms for what is possible. My contention is that today government largely defines what the VCS is and what it should do and at the higher levels of the sector this is accepted as situation normal. Whilst some in the VCS might demur they are usually without power, which is to say, in terms of realpolitik, their views don't count, they don't define or lead the agenda.

Freire would have us say a true word; to name our world and thereby transform it, to break out of the oppressive mould. Naming the world starts from critical questioning - why is it this way and not another - from which a dialogue builds. Three critical questions: given New Labour's funding of the sector where did all the money go? What does VCS leadership equate to? Are values of social justice compati-

The size of the not-for-profit sector in Britain, estimated by the number of active charities, grew by more than 70% from 1991 to 2004 (NCVO 2007, The UK Civil Society Almanac). And yet in 2007, government reported <sup>(1)</sup> that at a time when government funding of the third sector had doubled, small and medium sized charities had got smaller and poorer (Treasury & Cabinet Office, 2007, 10, paragraph 1.15). At a time when the VCS had more money than ever before, most charities got less money. <sup>(2)</sup> If we follow the money we will note that the wealth did not trickle down to smaller grassroots community organisations. It was expropriated by way of an inside job under the guise of capacity building. In 2010 the National Audit Commission was to note that the ChangeUp programme had made no strategic impact. This was largely untrue but there was just enough truth to discredit the sector and hasten an avalanche of disproportionate cuts. The leadership of the VCS is closely tied to this monopoly of funding: money = power = leadership. The fate of the NVCO/ACEVO VCS leadership centre in Henley <sup>(3)</sup> likewise came to typify leadership as corporate competition. Behind such morbid symptoms of a dying sector lies the ideology of the market, the arbiter of monetary value, for which moral issues are a dead letter. Market norms are a poisonous pedagogy when extended uncritically into civil society. Given the turmoil of financial markets inspired by reckless and sociopathic business practice it beggars belief that the VCS would look to the private sector for inspiration. And yet everything from assets to community enterprise is couched in these terms.

For actions we simply need to assert our own values, articulate our agenda and take collective action; we need to organise, educate and agitate for the change we want to see happen. There is no blueprint or substitute for movement

building but for solutions and actions I reach for DeFillipis, Fisher and Shragge's recent book <sup>(4)</sup> which present six propositions:

- An understanding of the importance of community
- To organise beyond community
- An emphasis on conflict and power
- To unite community and social movements
- Critical analysis and political education
- The desire to make history

The Big Society, officially off the government agenda after 5 launches / re-launches has not translated to Burkean platoons of small community associations – enter Capita, Serco, G4S as the face of voluntary action, exit the VCS as we have known amidst mergers, redundancies, occasional tenacity and not infrequent ignominious collapse. It is as good a time as any to change the rules of the game.

<sup>(1)</sup> Treasury & Cabinet Office. (2007) *The Future Role of the 3rd Sector in Economic and Social Regeneration*, Norwich, The Stationery Office.

<sup>(2)</sup> Unseen, Unequal, Untapped, Unleashed (2010) Community Sector Coalition

<sup>(3)</sup> <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/Management/article/892867/Mediation-could-solved-Third-Sector-Leadership-Centre-row/?HAYILC=RELATED> (Accessed 19 December 2012).

<sup>(4)</sup> DeFillipis, J, Fisher, R & Shragge, E (2010) *Contesting Community: the limits and potential of local organising*. New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press

**Mathew Scott is a a director of the Community Sector Coalition and a member of the National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA)**

## **Unleashing the potential of informal community organizing: the way forward to mainstream volunteerism into the local development agenda.**

### **Simone Galimberti**

Nepal, an ancient society with such extraordinary socio-cultural heritage, boasts an incredible high level of social capital expressed in multifold examples of self help and community centered traditions well rooted at local level.

The country, still emerging from a complex post civil conflict transition, has the potential to lead on how the power of civic engagement, represented by loose communities and informal groups, can deliver social community based development.

In the current scenario, Nepal needs to ensure that this vast tradition of community mobilization and action will be harnessed rather than that being annihilating.

It is a complex challenge that if properly addressed, can rewrite the working modalities of the so called aid and development sector.

In the process it is really important to highlight how informality, so hard to define and measure, is often the indispensable ingredient to describe community initiatives at grassroots.

This level of informality is normally accompanied by a high degree of spontaneity that emerges through the social behaviors, unwritten norms and habits that once played a very predominant role in the community of the country.

In such circumstances, with local people lacking the most basic services and infrastructures, self help initiatives played an enormous role in the daily life, making a real the difference for the majority of disenfranchised citizens.

The last decades saw the impressive evolution of the development process, publicly funded but with great contributions by external development agencies, a progress marked by an incremental move towards "professionalism" aid and development

versus what has been the informally led community organizing.

At the same time, this trend, a key determinant for enhanced living conditions of the local population, might bring a side effect: the loss of creativity and positive spirit stemming from local social capital that for so long contributed not only to develop local communities but also to enhance their sense of cohesiveness.

How to ensure that these informal and not fully recognized energies can be embedded in the local development process formally or informally? How do local community civic service efforts can be harnessed and be part of what can become a community centered governance system? How can volunteerism be, at the best of its informality, fully involved and recognized in the service delivery mechanisms?

The starting point for this reflection is that volunteerism and civic engagement are key agents of local development, vastly contributing to the creation of the so called "engaged community", not an idyllic platonic aggregation but a real place on the earth where community engagement is realized through the selfless contributions of the people.

The engaged society, founded on the concept of civic partnerships among people, should harness the best out of community entrepreneurship, leading to the rethinking of the meaning of democratic participation in order to foster a real Community Centered Governance where real power is devolved to local communities, well positioned to set their priorities and translate them in action.

Still devolving authorities and responsibilities to the bottom is not enough to ensure the inclusion of volunteering efforts in the local development agenda.

It is necessary to reformulate the way formal service delivery mechanisms are run, finding a new space where professional care and service can coexist with volunteering led delivery models and actions.

The challenges ahead will have to find ways to mainstreaming volunteering in the community development plans, making sure that volunteering efforts can be fully taken into account while devising a local governance system that puts community in the center.

Promotion and creation of synergies between formal and informal development initiatives will be essential in order to unleash and not castrate the vital energies that once used to make a real difference in the daily life of everybody.

One element seems to be indispensable in this process: the need to create formally recognized volunteering infrastructures able to keep alive the "informal" civic efforts being in place.

Is the need of formal structure to support the informal ones paradoxically a plain contradiction? Possibly and hopefully it is not the case.

The supporting volunteering infrastructures can become of paramount importance in order not only to maintain alive but also to strengthen the spirits of care, altruism that are the defining features of any volunteering efforts.

Importantly these new infrastructures to be designed by scratch based on local expertise and insights and to be shaped up according to local traditions and customs, will be able to connect with local realities, offering new platform to strengthen the local "commons" that, well underestimated, contribute dramati-

cally to local development.

The same enabling conditions that we must pursue will be conducive in meeting another key challenge: valuing and rewarding these informal efforts, the real constituents of civic participation.

The challenge ahead is clear: valuing volunteering and civic participation in formal development process, ensuring that the latter can be reshaped thanks to the unnoticed contributions of individuals empowered by the same activism that turn them into full citizens.

The result of this process would be a new development paradigm that fully acknowledges the complementarities of professional, subsidized development, often propelled by aid industry and informal initiatives of local citizenry.

It will be necessary to forge a new "receipt" based on the intrinsic amalgamation between formal and informal development efforts, with the former, represented by local development agencies, non state actors able to value and recognize but not giving it for granted, the "ordinary" and at the same time "extraordinary" contributions local people can offer.

At the end of the day, the engaged community envisioned here, would bring to a mix model of service delivery where formal and informal actors cooperate and work together, shaping up the local development space.

**Simone Galimberti is Co-Founder of ENGAGE ([www.engage.org.np](http://www.engage.org.np)), a new social venture promoting volunteerism in Nepal and Director of the Course on Volunteerism and Social Work held annually in Kathmandu.**

**E-mail: [simone\\_engage@yahoo.com](mailto:simone_engage@yahoo.com)**

For further information and to register please visit:

[www.uea.ac.uk/ahp/fulbright-programme2013](http://www.uea.ac.uk/ahp/fulbright-programme2013)



**School of Allied Health Professions, University of East Anglia**  
**Fulbright Visiting Scholar Programme 2013**  
**Community Participation in Research: from paradigms to practice**  
**5 May — 13 June 2013**

The **School of Allied Health Professions (AHP)** at the **University of East Anglia (UEA)** is fortunate to be able to offer an exciting programme of interdisciplinary local and national events with the eminent **Fulbright Senior Scholar David Horton Smith**, as **Visiting Professor of Altruistics and Community Engagement**. These events have emerged through partnerships involving the following organisations: **Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector (ARVAC)**, **Norwich Business School (NBS)** at UEA, the Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences Enterprise (FMHE) at UEA, **UEA Community-University Engagement (CUE)**, and the **Norfolk and Suffolk Dementia Alliance**.

**Wednesday 8 May 2013**

**12pm (for lunch); 12.30pm to 2.30pm**

**UEA, Norwich**

**WORKSHOP:** The Role of Disability Associations in Creating Equality in Participation in Health Research

**Tuesday 14 May 2013**

**12pm (for lunch); 12.30pm to 2.30pm**

**UEA, Norwich**

**WORKSHOP:** Developing Social Enterprises for Community Wellbeing

**Wednesday 22 May 2013**

**1.30pm (for lunch); 2pm to 4pm**

**UEA, Norwich**

**WORKSHOP:** The Dark Side of Philanthropy: the challenge for governance

**Wednesday 29 May 2013**

**1pm (for lunch); 1.30 to 3.30pm**

**UEA, Norwich**

**WORKSHOP:** The Role of Universities in Encouraging Community Participation in Research

**Thursday 6 June 2013. UEA, London**

**1pm (for registration); 1.30pm to 4.30pm**

**CONFERENCE:** Community Participation in Research: from paradigms to practice

In combination with the **ARVAC Annual Lecture**, and UEA's 50th Anniversary celebrations.

Speakers include Prof David Horton Smith and Prof Peter Beresford. Chair: Dr Jurgen Grotz

For more details and registration, please go to

[www.uea.ac.uk/ahp/fulbright-programme2013](http://www.uea.ac.uk/ahp/fulbright-programme2013)



## Answer the question!

### Jimini Cricket

Goethe's Faust proclaims:

*I have studied Philosophy, Law,  
Medicine and, alas, even Theology,  
Yet here I stand, a poor fool, and see,  
That I am just as wise as when I started.*

This is a rather loose translation of Goethe's poetic original, I fear. Remember, I am just a cricket.

Now, some of you may remember Faust's choices following those insights. In a desperate search for a different kind of knowledge he sells his soul to the devil. Not only did this get him into big trouble, worse still, by wanting to be close to her, he brings ruin to the one that looks to him for love and answers.

Before Faust ruins Gretchen, she asks him a very pertinent question. Her question is about religion at the time, but it surely doesn't have to be about religion. It could have been about Philosophy, Law or Medicine just as well, or about whether you truly respect those that look to you for answers.

Faust avoids answering the question, because it is awkward for him and difficult in any case. I guess you have heard of the "Gretchenfrage" (Gretchen's question).

Well, these days, I hear, the learned ones, again, seek different knowledge and apparently want to be closer to those who look to them for answers. Very Faustian.

I am only a cricket, so I don't understand these things, but it sounds to me as if those so well studied should take heed from Faust's deeds, watch what their decisions will do to themselves, and more importantly to others.

And maybe, just maybe they should try to answer their 'Gretchenfragen' first. Those questions going directly to the core of the issue and those questions that are difficult and unpleasant to answer. Questions posed by those looking to the learned ones for answers.

I think we can learn from Faust how important it is not to get it wrong. Cricketlike, that is Faust very loosely interpreted, I fear.

**Jimini Cricket is the *nom du plume* of a member of ARVAC.**



ARVAC Office, c/o

The School of Allied Health Professions

The University of East Anglia

Norwich, NR4 7TJ

promoting effective community action  
through research

#### About ARVAC

ARVAC (The Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector) was established in 1978. It is a membership organisation and acts as a resource for people interested in research in or on community organisations.

We believe that voluntary and community organisations play a vital role in creating and sustaining healthy communities, and that research plays an essential role in increasing the effectiveness of those organisations involved in voluntary and community action.

#### We want to hear from you:

Please send us:

- News items
- Details of new publications, resources or websites
- Information about research in progress
- Meetings or events you would like us to publicise
- Comments or opinion pieces you would like to share with other ARVAC members

by e-mail to  
jürgen@arvac.org.uk