

Growing Community Assets

Final evaluation report

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Growing Community Assets final evaluation report

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Introduction

The Big Lottery Fund's Growing Community Assets (GCA) investment area is enabling communities throughout Scotland to have more control and influence over their future development through owning and developing local assets.

This is a summary of the final report of the five year evaluation of the first round of GCA – GCA1 – which operated between 2006 and 2010. The evaluation was undertaken by SQW Ltd. from 2008 to 2013. The evaluation took a mixed-method approach incorporating project case studies, as well as surveys of project managers and users, and of households in the communities where the GCA1 projects are located.

Under this first round of GCA, 127 awards totalling just over £48 million were made to a diverse range of projects spread across the length and breadth of Scotland. The second round of GCA – GCA2 – is currently open to applications and to date, 15 projects have been awarded funding of around £10 million.

This summary reviews the impact of GCA1 in terms of the outcomes achieved. It also provides useful advice for communities and other interests involved in the community acquisition and ownership of assets.

You can find out more about GCA and the evaluation of the first round of the investment area at www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

Impact

Progress on GCA1 outcomes

GCA1 aims to achieve five outcomes. The evaluation reports the following progress:

Outcome 1 – Communities are stronger, with shared aspirations and the ability to achieve these together.

- ▶ The GCA1 investment area has made a big contribution to strengthening communities and helping them to achieve ambitions. This is one of the outcomes where the investment area has been most effective, especially in reducing social isolation and creating social networks, and particularly among more elderly community members. The strongest effects were in some of the smaller rural communities.
- ▶ A survey of households in areas where 12 GCA1 projects are located shows that where people visit or are involved with GCA projects they rate their area and community more highly, they know more people and they feel they have more influence over local decisions.
- ▶ Among those in households surveyed that were aware of the GCA1 project, around half considered it had made the area a better place to live and had brought the community together.
- ▶ A survey of people using community facilities found that 58% considered them to have brought the community together and 59% now felt more aware of community decisions, while around a third had become more involved in their community as a result.
- ▶ Significant time and cost savings have resulted in many cases because people no longer have to travel sometimes substantial distances to access the services or facilities they need.

Outcome 2 – Communities have services and amenities that meet people's needs better and are more accessible.

- ▶ The GCA1 investment area has made a significant contribution to this outcome by supporting projects that have brought a wide range of new and better services to communities.
- ▶ Based on information provided by projects, an estimated 36,000 people across Scotland are using GCA1 supported community-owned services and facilities.
- ▶ Among those in households surveyed that were aware of the GCA1 projects, 74% considered the project had provided services and amenities that meet peoples' needs better.
- ▶ Among those using community facilities, 66% would not have been able to access the same service locally, and among those that did have this option, 80% considered their GCA1 facility to be "much better".
- ▶ In the projects covered by the user survey, three quarters of the people using the facilities are visiting them once a week or more.
- ▶ In the five communities where new facilities opened between 2008 and 2012, the household survey shows higher ratings for facilities for culture, young people and sports, and this can, at least in part, be attributed to the GCA1 projects.

Outcome 3 – People have more skills, knowledge and confidence, and opportunities to use these for the benefit of the community.

- ▶ Overall, the strongest impacts on skills, knowledge and confidence are in the development and management of the projects themselves and through strengthening social links, rather than through more formal training or skills.
- ▶ Projects instil skills and confidence mainly through arts, sports and social activities, although direct training opportunities have also been provided to around 1,400 people. The assets developed and

the facilities supported provide a solid platform for developing more skills and formal training in the future.

- ▶ The impacts reported vary greatly across the projects depending on what they offer, but most scored highly on some criteria. For example, on Westray there had been increases in skills through working together. The Ballantrae recycling centre had saved all its users money and Route 81 had led to a large majority of users making new friends.
- ▶ A survey of facility users found that the biggest individual benefits were in making new friends and contacts (49%), saving money (28%), developing new skills (17%) and improving physical fitness (19%).
- ▶ Based on responses from the project leaders, there are over 700 people involved in project management across 81 operational projects. These management positions predominantly comprise roles on Boards and around 1,700 regular volunteers.

Outcome 4 – Communities are more able to grasp opportunities, and are more enterprising and self-reliant.

- ▶ In terms of the community as a whole, the survey of households found that 53% of respondents that had visited or been involved with a project felt that the GCA1 project had increased the “ambition and confidence” of the community to take on other activities.
- ▶ The process of securing the GCA1 project demonstrates a community that can grasp opportunities and is enterprising. In some cases the process has helped set up or bring together community organisations that would not be in place otherwise.
- ▶ While there are examples of projects that have been able to use the assets to generate income and grow (most obviously the renewable energy projects and some of the more established

community organisations), others are still focused on making their first project sustainable in challenging conditions and will take longer to ‘find their feet’.

- ▶ For other projects, being ‘self-reliant’ simply means having more control over how an asset is used. Many of the smaller, volunteer run projects now consider themselves to be more self-reliant.
- ▶ Given the generally weak economy, there has been fairly modest progress recently in developing more employment and enterprise. In total, 337 full-time jobs and 301 part-time jobs have been created or safeguarded. The greatest proportions of jobs are based in the community facility projects. There, and in community social enterprise projects, part-time employment has grown noticeably recently, a probable consequence of increasingly unfavourable financial conditions.
- ▶ In total, 143 businesses have been accommodated and 15 new businesses have started as a result or as part of GCA1 projects. Half of these businesses are accommodated in Out of the Blue.
- ▶ Just about one third of projects have developed other projects on the back of the ownership of their new asset, or have used this to leverage additional funding.

Outcome 5 – Communities have a more positive impact on the local and global environment.

- ▶ The contribution to this outcome has been strong. The environment has been an important part of most of the projects supported and efforts have taken a variety of forms.
- ▶ 17 GCA1 community energy projects are operating or connecting to the national grid in the next 12 months and will generate 9.8 MW of renewable energy. These projects have inspired other communities, like those in South Uist and elsewhere, to generate their own power and therefore income, while at the same time making a major contribution to reducing CO².

- ▶ Thanks to the shops, post offices and petrol stations saved or created, there has been a positive impact on reducing fuel consumption. In the household survey, this was most noticeable at Auchencairn.
- ▶ Overall 13% of respondents to the household survey had reduced their household energy consumption as a result of a GCA project.
- ▶ Among those that had visited them, or been involved, the proportion of those that feel GCA1 projects had had a positive impact on the upkeep of their area was 52%. Among those that were merely aware of projects it was 35%.
- ▶ Almost all the new build and refurbished projects use environmentally friendly heating systems and building materials. The new centre built by the Gairloch and Loch Ewe Action Forum (GALE) was

the first public passive building in Scotland and The Big Shed project in Loch Tay won a Carbon Trust Scotland Low Carbon Building Award 2013.

- ▶ The Milton of Balgonie project has redeveloped a waste site into a nature area. Several others have created a number of new gardens.
- ▶ A number of recycling projects (such as RECAP and Ballantrae) not only save users money, but also divert waste from landfill.

Impact on lives and communities

Household and user surveys were used to try to find out how some GCA1 projects have impacted on people and communities. Typically, respondents to the surveys indicated that the new facility or project had had a positive impact, though different projects had different impacts.

How much of a difference has the project made to you and your community?

All projects	User survey	Household survey (regular users)	Household survey (all that have visited or been involved)
How much of a difference has the project made to YOUR quality of life. Response: 'A big difference'	64%	49%	29%
How much of a difference has the project made to the quality of life in the COMMUNITY. Response: 'A big difference'	83%	71%	50%

Sources: User survey of 449 users at 15 projects; Household survey of 190 regular users and 495 people that have visited or been involved across 12 GCA1 projects

Future plans

Projects vary in terms of their future ambitions and plans. This diverse picture fits with the 'community assets spectrum' identified by Aiken et al (2001, p6), against which the evaluators have mapped the 127 GCA awards.

Category	Characteristics	% of GCA awards	Project examples
Community developers	Medium-sized organisations, often with a range of assets involved in local service delivery and local partnerships. Normally have paid staff and mixed sources of income.	Approx. 33%	Auchencairn Enterprise Centre; Lambhill Stables; Banking on Neilston; A'the Arts Centre
Stewards	Small, mainly volunteer-run groups with a single, long-standing asset (usually a building), used largely for hiring out to local community groups and residents. Generate little income and rarely employ staff.	18%	An Cridhe-Coll Community Centre; Evanston Village Centre Regeneration; Isle of Muck Community Centre; Northbay Inner Harbour Project
Entrepreneurs	Organisations running large, more professional social enterprises. Still community-based but likely to have a mix of capital-intensive assets for social and commercial purposes, operating to a business model.	10%	Ballantrae Recycling Workshop and Retail Outfit; Midlothian Social Enterprise Centre; Out of the Blue Arts & Education Centre; Tobermory Harbour Association

Source : Adapted from Aiken, M., Cairns, B. and Moran, R. (June 2011), Community organisations controlling assets : a better understanding. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.

Community ownership

The concept of community ownership is undoubtedly very popular. 92% of project users surveyed thought it was a "good thing" and 86% of the households surveyed thought that community ownership of their local project had had a positive impact on their locality.

However, while people like the idea of community ownership, enthusiasm for actually getting involved is weaker, particularly among the urban projects covered by the household survey. It appears, therefore, that willingness to take up volunteering and decision-making positions in projects is greatest in remote, rural areas.

Benefits of community ownership

Communities identified the benefits of community ownership as being that:

- The community knows local needs best
- Income is retained locally
- Projects are run by the community – not by the Council
- It attracts greater buy-in, support and participation from the community
- It generates more enthusiasm.

Almost all projects felt that community ownership brought some benefits, though these varied according to project geography.

Benefits of community ownership reported by project managers

Project geography	Benefits
Remote rural	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Social – Keeps life in the area and encourages people to communicate more● Improved quality of life – Young and old have access to facilities and services that would otherwise require travel to get to.● Focus on local needs – Projects can respond to local needs quicker and more flexibly than statutory agencies, and lobby more effectively on behalf of their communities.● Sense of pride and confidence.
Small towns and accessible rural	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Influence and responsibility – Community members feel they influence local outcomes and there is a sense of responsibility that comes with ownership.● Integration – Community ownership encourages people to come together and helps integrate young and old.● Marketing tool – It provides community organisations with a tool to improve community buy-in and involvement.
Urban	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Financial viability – An asset on a balance sheet helps to secure future funding.● Targeted support – Such as social opportunities for the elderly, childcare, and employment support for people with disabilities, etc.● Buy-in – Community ownership helps to attract funding and people.

Source: SQW- Project Leader Survey 2013

The factors most commonly identified by project managers as making the biggest contribution to a successful community ownership project were:

- **Community engagement** – Project participants need to be visible and ‘out and about’ in the community, engaging with community members rather than simply paying ‘lip service’ to consultation.
- **Commitment** – Community members need to be willing to give their time, effort and expertise.
- **Needs based** – There should be a clear understanding of community needs.
- **Dedicated staff resource** – A project will progress more quickly with a paid staff resource: if every aspect of the project relies on voluntary time and effort, progress will be slow.

Challenges

Despite its many benefits, the evaluation illustrates that community ownership can be demanding and challenging. While some of these challenges have changed as the GCA projects have developed, others have stayed the same. The main challenges identified in the last year of the evaluation were:

- ▶ **Over-dependence on the same people** – Over time, there can be continuing reliance on the same volunteers putting in time and effort. It can be difficult to get more community members to take responsibility, but a successful project is more attractive to be part of than a struggling one.
- ▶ **Building maintenance** – There have been challenges in building operations and maintenance that have led to unforeseen costs. This highlights the need to ensure there is sufficient contingency built in to budgets. Challenges experienced include various “snagging” problems with complex heating systems, poor design in relation to needs, and forward planning for equipment replacement.

- ▶ **Support and awareness** – Getting people to support the idea of community ownership can be a challenge at the outset, but even once ownership is achieved, not all community members grasp the concept and some still think the building is Council or church-owned, etc. This calls for constant promotion and consultation which are time-consuming.
- ▶ **Managing volunteers** – For projects with a large volunteer cohort, assessing capacity and coordination can prove difficult. Organisations need to have the time and infrastructure to support and train volunteers.
- ▶ **Legal technicalities** – Projects have faced challenges (time and cost) due to issues finding suitable legal structures (e.g. how to set up a charity with a community-owned asset, and how a profit-making trading arm can obtain a commercial loan).
- ▶ **Transition to more professional structures**
 - The transition from a voluntary organisation to a social enterprise or a more professional business structure can prove difficult in terms of the capacity needed and the change of culture. One project said the biggest challenge emerged when it became an employer.
- ▶ **Managing expectations** – In some cases community members expect that because an asset is community owned, its services or activities should be free to community members. Additionally, expectations of community members can be unrealistic in terms of what it is possible for volunteers to deliver as compared to a professional business. The pressure to reduce or keep charges low reduces the ability to generate income for future investment.

- ▶ **Financial sustainability** is perhaps the single, biggest challenge for many projects and has become an increasing priority for the managers of operational projects. The generally unfavourable economic conditions have certainly played a part in limiting the income generating potential of some projects. This makes cautious business planning by projects, and the provision of adequate budgetary contingency, vital.
- ▶ **Community engagement** – Securing and maintaining the engagement of the local community is also an on-going challenge for many projects. Local interest and engagement is relatively easy to harness in the early stages of a project when there is excitement and enthusiasm about what might be achieved, but community asset ownership requires long-term commitment that can be hard to sustain. This situation may be helped by boards playing a more prominent role in promoting projects.
- ▶ **Creativity and development** – For projects to grow, they will need to invest resources in innovating and testing new ideas. Tighter finances make this a necessity, but, at the same time, can also restrict the resources available for it.
- ▶ **Monitoring and measuring** – Many projects find it difficult to identify the number and profile of people using and benefiting from their facilities and services. This makes management of the project more challenging since without measurement, projects will have no idea whether they are succeeding or not, and it will rob them of important evidence to support applications to potential funders.

The community ownership process

The table below sets out the development process that the GCA evaluators suggest community asset ownership projects should follow, beginning with the initial idea through to service delivery and ongoing operation.

Stage	Actions
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define purpose/strategic fit/project objectives Gather support, information and advice Identify project champion(s) Identify potential asset(s)/site(s) Establish availability of asset Set up organisation/ensure governance structures are fit for purpose
Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put in place sufficient management capacity and competence for feasibility stage Options appraisal Risk assessment/develop risk control strategy Obtain legal advice Feasibility study Obtain permissions (e.g. planning, building regulations, right to buy, etc.)
Acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare ownership documentation/complete missives
Building and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appoint project manager for building/development stage Develop design brief Establish work programme/schedule Appoint and manage contract team Obtain legal advice Develop detailed design and costings Consult community/users on proposed design Submit design for full planning permission Ensure regulatory requirements are met
Service development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment and management of delivery staff Consultation with users/residents/community
Service delivery and ongoing operation of asset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange insurances Ongoing consultation/engagement of users/ residents/community Management of delivery staff Ensure legal/regulatory compliance Develop new services Manage service agreements Enforce suitable governance strategies Develop and implement maintenance programme
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity needs analysis Create a baseline measure for what is to change Identify and engage other stakeholders/develop partnerships in the public, private and third sectors Plan and implement the process of community engagement Secure funding for project feasibility study
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish demand/needs analysis/identify users Develop a business case for investment Develop a business plan for activities Undertake site survey Obtain estimates for cost of acquisition Obtain estimates for cost of development Secure funding for project implementation Campaigning/lobbying/raising awareness of project
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take ownership of asset Publicise ownership of asset
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure any additional funding required for build stage Arrange asset insurance Continue building networks Develop policies and procedures Work on site Seek building control approval for completed works Handover of completed works Purchase and install fixtures/fittings/equipment Monitoring of project progress
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish/manage service agreements Develop new services
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement business plan Marketing and promotion of services Set up financial management system Monitoring and evaluation Generate income/secure funds for ongoing activities Establish and implement policies and procedures Develop partnerships

Source : Developed by SQW Consulting and based on the ATU support map (available at <http://atu.org.uk/Support/AssetMap>), DTA guide to asset development for community and social enterprises (available at <http://atu.org.uk/Support/toolkits/THATH>), and evidence from GCA case study visits.

Depending upon the nature of the project, some may not need to go through every stage of the process. (For example, a community group buying a building that is already fit for purpose rather than having to construct a new build may be able to miss out stages one to three and start at stage four.)

Success factors

The GCA evaluators also suggest that the presence of the following factors may influence whether or not a community is able to own and manage an asset effectively:

- A local organisation, community led and owned, which is ready to manage and deliver the project
- Adequate financial and business planning in place
- The ability to generate a sustainable income
- Having capacity and leadership locally, and the ability to build future capacity in order to enable succession planning
- Strong governance and management in place
- Good communications between the lead organisation, the community and wider stakeholders
- Support from the community
- Strong external networks
- Access to appropriate training, guidance and support
- Confidence to undertake the project
- Commitment to persevere
- Ensuring that the assets are fit for purpose
- Public sector agencies responding constructively to community asset ownership.

The crucial role of local authorities

Many of the assets bought with GCA1 funding were acquired from public bodies, and in particular from local authorities. The evaluation has shown how crucial local Councils can be when it comes to enabling communities to achieve their aspirations to own and manage public assets. This can range from an authority's attitude to the community ownership of assets (i.e. whether they are prepared to dispose of assets to community groups), through to the support – financial or otherwise – they are willing to provide to the new community owners after they acquire the former Council property. The GCA evaluation makes it clear that there are both benefits and challenges for all of the parties involved in such transactions.

Practical lessons for projects

A table has been compiled of the practical lessons GCA1 projects say they have learned to help make community ownership a success.

Community ownership success factors –practical lessons learned from project experience

Wider community involvement

- Actively engage and work with the community from the outset – this helps create enthusiasm.
- Manage community aspirations.
- Generate a feeling of ownership from day one – this can't be left to the later stages.
- Have lots of avenues for the community to get involved.
- Be frank, honest and transparent in discussions so as to overcome any challenges.
- Try to create some 'quick wins' – visible, tangible outcomes that show the community there is something happening, even if the longer-term goals will take longer to achieve.

Time and commitment

- Be realistic and if anything overestimate the time needed.
- Have volunteers who will stick at it – even if the project journey takes ten years.
- Perseverance – don't give-up!
- Ensure there are enough local people to get involved on a day to day basis without over-burdening the same individuals.

Project design

- Establish the need for the project clearly from the beginning.
- Liaise with other community groups in the local area – 'don't step on toes'!
- Visit other community ownership projects and learn from them.
- Be willing to be flexible as inevitably things will change.
- Business planning is vital, especially when including a rental element (like office or café space, etc.) – have solid evidence of demand and be aware of vulnerability to economic conditions.

Broad range of skills on the project Board

- Attract a mixture of people with both business skills & community knowledge. (Retired professionals play a key role.)
- People that understand what the project is trying to achieve at each stage (through construction, community engagement, etc.)
- The Board needs to communicate well and continuously, especially with the community (who need to be listened to too).
- Be clear and business-like in making appointments. (Many Community Buy-Outs have a tendency to let 'anyone and everyone' get involved, and this does not always work)

Management and capacity

- If possible, employ a full-time project manager from the start – this takes the pressure off volunteers and can be useful in managing any resistance locally.
- Build capacity and leadership locally with a view to successful succession planning.
- Organise access to appropriate training, guidance and support.
- Don't try to do too much on a limited staff resource as this will dilute effort.

Funding

- Be honest and don't underestimate costs to try to make an application look as if it is better value for money.
- Learn funding language.
- Don't design a project around available funding – instead design projects based on need and not what you think funders would like to see, otherwise a project can lose its essence.
- Get technical assistance at the start, if available, as it gives the project a good foundation.

Support

- Take full advantage of the range of support available – speak to everyone you possibly can who can help.
- It is worth paying money for specialist/expertise advice (e.g. on VAT, HR, construction) – it might be expensive but it will save time and money in the long-run.
- External networks – make sure your project 'is seen' and develop relationships with individuals in support and funding agencies.
- Maintain good communications between the lead organisation, the community and wider stakeholders.

Sustainability

- Be prepared to adapt project direction and activities to raise revenue and increase community involvement if original plans are not working.
- Continuously monitor what is working and what is not, and use this to take corrective action.

Moving forward

Urban/rural differences

GCA1's predecessor, the Scottish Land Fund, supported communities with a population of 10,000 or less to acquire, manage and develop rural land and some land assets. GCA1 extended support to communities throughout the whole of Scotland – both rural and urban – to acquire and develop not just land and land assets, but all sorts of assets that were important to communities and for their future.

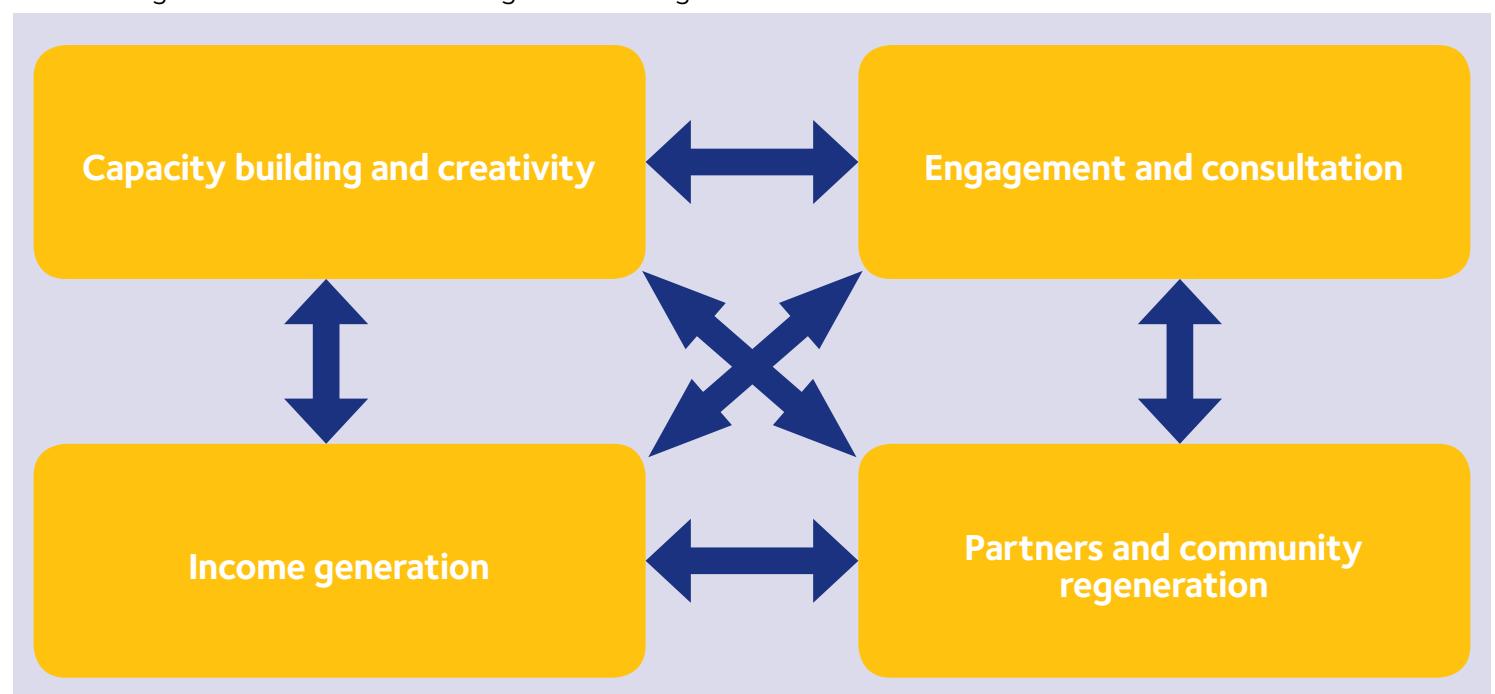
Given the head start that rural Scotland enjoyed through the Scottish Land Fund, unsurprisingly, in the early days of GCA1, most applications were submitted by rural community groups. However, as the investment area progressed, more applications were received and awards made to projects in urban areas. The evaluation points up some interesting and important differences in the experiences of projects in these two types of area.

The household survey demonstrated more limited interest in volunteering and managing projects in urban areas. The greater interest shown in rural areas, and particularly in remote rural areas, might be due to the stronger tradition of volunteering and of 'doing

things for themselves' that exists there. On the surface, therefore, the remote and rural projects would seem to have a greater chance of success: survey results also tend to show that people in these areas seem to be more engaged with the GCA projects, which report bigger impacts. But while urban projects have more potential to make a difference to greater numbers of people, they also face greater challenges in building local capacity. Moreover, while the early experiences of some new urban projects have been fairly positive, funding and sustainability remain concerns. And community engagement is proving to be a big challenge for some other urban projects. In looking ahead, therefore, the evaluators suggest that urban communities, and particularly the more disadvantaged of these, will continue to need greater support with community ownership projects if the potentially greater benefits are to be achieved.

Future focus

The evaluators identify four key factors as being particularly important for successful community ownership. The four factors and their mutually supportive relationships are set out below.



The two factors on the top – capacity building and creativity, and engagement and consultation – relate to how the project or organisation operates within the community, while the two factors on the bottom – income generation, and partners and community regeneration – relate to what the project or organisation does.

The four factors can interact in such a way as to strengthen projects and many of the better GCA projects are strong in all four, with each factor supporting the others. For example, creativity and capacity can help find ways to generate income. Income helps build engagement and attracts partners, and this, in turn, supports further capacity building. In other cases working with partners may provide income and support capacity building, which in turn can help strengthen engagement.

The evaluators also highlight two of these four factors – capacity building and income generation – together with another two themes – vision and need, and understanding the community – as four areas that it will be important to focus on in taking GCA forward into the future.

- **Capacity building** – As well as building capacity ‘across the board’, and especially, of course, in those communities with low capacity, all applicant communities would benefit from receiving support to identify ways of generating income.
- **Income generation** – Projects that can generate income are not only more likely to be able to grow their asset rather than just sustain it, but will also stand a better chance of enjoying community independence and empowerment.
- **Vision and need** – Projects that fit with wider community goals and that are driven by a vision and need are more likely to be sustainable. Communities and funders should all consider the wider context to ensure that projects will not operate in isolation, but rather will complement wider action and activities taking place or planned for their communities.
- **Understanding the community** – There is more that could be done by many of the projects to understand their communities and the profile of users and non-users. Monitoring and regular consultation are critical in making most community-owned projects work, and in ensuring they are able to respond early.

Application of learning from the evaluation

The Big Lottery Fund, through first the Scottish Land Fund and then GCA1, has now been helping communities to acquire and develop all sorts of assets for more than 12 years. Although increased interest in the community ownership of assets has emerged over this period not only from communities, but also from funders and policy makers, a constant criticism has been that insufficient evidence exists of the benefits and challenges for all parties involved.

As the biggest funder of this sort of activity we are proud to have commissioned the biggest evaluation of it. We are delighted to share the findings and learning from the evaluation with everyone who is interested in this topic.

Learning from the first four years of the GCA evaluation has already informed and comprised a lot of the evidence that the Fund provided to recent consultations on the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill and land reform review, and to the inquiry into the delivery of regeneration in Scotland undertaken by the Local Government and Regeneration Committee of the Scottish Parliament. Some of the learning from the evaluation about community renewable energy projects was also included in the Fund's response to the recent Call for Evidence from the UK Government Department of Energy and Climate Change on community energy. It will also form the basis for the written evidence we will shortly submit to the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee consultation on a comprehensive land reform agenda for Scotland.

The findings from the evaluation have relevance to many elements and areas of policy interest in various aspects of local community life such as community engagement and empowerment, and public service delivery by community groups. We hope that the evaluation will make a valuable contribution to thinking on, and debate about, a whole range of related policy themes like the asset approach to community development, public service reform, early intervention and prevention.

We will also ensure that the learning and the experience gained over the course of the entire evaluation is put to good practical use by communities and organisations considering applying to the second round of GCA – GCA2. The learning and experience will also benefit applicants to the new Scottish Land Fund, launched in 2012, which the Big Lottery Fund and Highlands and Islands Enterprise are administering on behalf of the Scottish Government.

