Building VCS Strengths: Enabling VCS Success

Resource Book Sustainable Livelihoods

An Assets Based Organisational Evaluation Tool for Small Voluntary and Community Groups

Dr. Katy Goldstraw and Eve Davidson















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Foreword: Angus McCabe

The Asset Based Resource Book is a welcome, and timely, publication. All too often in small community groups we get pulled into just doing things. Responding to community needs that are in our faces with increasing demands on our time and resources. How often do we get the chance to stop, even for a moment, and think about our organisation: it's vision, history and future?

What is particularly welcome about the Resource Book is that it gives a clear structure to reflecting about our work and organisations – and how these can change over time. Further, all too often when we reflect on practice, we start with weaknesses. What is wrong with the organisation – what don't we have? The Resource Book starts from strengths and asks us to think about what we do have, how we can build on this and how those strengths may sustain and help us develop our work into the future. All the exercises and case studies included in the book are based on real experiences, real examples which makes the Resource Book both highly practical as well as thought provoking.

I recommend this clearly written and easy to use publication to anyone thinking about how they sustain and build their activities and organisations in austere times.

Angus McCabe
Senior Research Fellow
Third Sector Research Centre
University of Birmingham





About this Resource Book

What is this Book About?

This Resource Book is designed to support Community groups and VCS organisations to critically evaluate their assets and vulnerabilities.

The aim of the Book is to develop a resource for small voluntary and community (VCS) groups, this is based on Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis. The Resource Book will empower small VCS organisations to conduct an assets based organisational evaluation. In identifying assets, small voluntary and community groups can then focus on their strengths. Groups can identify their organisational assets and are then able to build strategy, which will enable them to develop as a group.

How other Community groups have used the Resource Book

In 2015 a Workshop was held with six small voluntary and community groups within Hulme and Greater Manchester. The Workshop facilitator used this Resource Book to work with these groups in order to identify where they might develop.

Comments included:

"I thought all the exercises were amazing and very useful for our organisation and the position we are in."

"A productive workshop that highlighted the positive aspects of the group and its members. In addition, the workshop was constructive in identifying the key areas for growth to move the group towards sustainability, in particular when looking towards areas to generate financial stability. An excellent afternoon that had a purpose and was useful to support our group in not only identifying, celebrating our past and current activities but also in motivating our group to passionately move forward to create a sustainable group to support individuals in the community."







Assets Based Evaluation and Empowering YOUR Group

What is Assets Based Evaluation?

Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis is an assets based approach that examines a series of categories that a community organisation might use to adapt or to change.

Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis involves a participatory process engaging staff, volunteers and Trustees to analyse organisational assets

An assets based approach, starts from a group's everyday experiences and uses this information to build up a picture of their strategies. This approach actively involves people and encourages everyone to take part. It is framed around enabling groups to achieve their own sustainable goals, building on their existing strategies.

A Sustainable Livelihood is made up of five sets of assets: Human, Social, Financial, Public and Financial. These five assets are woven together to create the organisation's whole asset base.









Description of Assets

Human Assets: the skills, knowledge, good health and ability to work together that enable staff, volunteers & trustees of small VCS organisations to achieve their objectives.

For example: the knowledge of members of a project from having lived in the area and been part of your community group for a long time. This Human Asset means that you know the history of your project, you know why you do things the way you do. This Human Asset is essential for funding bids, for building links with other organisations and for welcoming new volunteers.

Social Assets: the social resources which small VCS organisations can draw on including informal working relationships of trust, reciprocity and exchange with families, friends and neighbours as well as more formal groups (e.g. community and faith groups).

For example: the fact that your organisation shares a community office space means that you can nip downstairs to another VCS group's offices and borrow a stapler, have a conversation about the Local Neighbourhood Strategy or share volunteers for a community day. This Social Asset bonds you to your community, means that your community trusts you and means that when you need help then other groups are about and can support you.





Description of Assets

Physical Assets: the tools and equipment that small VCS organisations need to be productive along with the basic infrastructure needed to function – e.g. affordable digital technology, decent offices and access to information.

For example: These are the things that help an organisation work: access to a computer, use of a shared community office space, a post box, an office that you can store things for your project in like footballs for your youth group. The physical things around your organisation can make a huge difference, if you have access to a website or social media, this can make a big difference to a small community project.

Public Assets: Working relationships that small VCS organisations have with public services, including libraries, local organisations, and staff from local authorities, universities and colleges, as well as other small VCS organisations and general engagement within their community.

For example: if you are perhaps a small community parents group, then having a really good relationship with the local health visiting and midwifery team could mean that you can offer additional services for your members. It might be that the health visitor could come to your group and offer advice directly with your members.

For example: if you are a small mental health self-help group then having a good relationship with the local GP practice and Mental Health Nursing team can mean that you are better able to support your members. Good working relationships with public bodies can mean that your group can develop, get extra support for its members and work in partnership with public bodies to better support your community.







Description of Assets

Financial Assets: including various funding providers, business links, business plan, donations in kind.

Question: How is your organisation doing financially?

Do you expect funding to end soon? Have you applied for new funding? What are the requirements of a new funder? What support do you need to help you to develop successfully?

Do you need help with Funding or Business Planning?

LOCAL LINKS: Your local Council for Voluntary
Service (CVS) or University Community
Partnership will most likely have some links
that they can signpost you to.

Greater Manchester

www.manchestercommunitycentral.org

www.gmcvo.org.uk

www.vsnw.org.uk

www.manchesterpartnership.org.uk

NATIONAL SUPPORT:

Useful National Resources include the
National Council for Voluntary Organisations,
NCVO www.ncvo.org.uk and Funding Central
www.fundingcentral.org.uk







Why this approach is useful for YOUR Small Voluntary and Community Group?

This Resource Book will help community and voluntary groups identify their assets and then build strategies based on their strengths. The voluntary and community sector has a wealth of non-financial assets and whilst many VCS organisations do not have substantial funding, their resilience throughout the last century of changing politics and their ability to react and recover from crises make small VCS and Community groups well suited to an assets based evaluation.

This Resource Book uses Sustainable Livelihoods
Analysis, to examine an organisation's assets - financial,
physical, social, human and public. A key principle of the
Sustainable Livelihoods approach is to recognise that
these assets are interlinked and need to be considered
together, in order to understand a small VCS
organisation's livelihood strategy; their vulnerabilities
and potential opportunities.

Once organisational assets have been considered, voluntary and community organisations can then develop solution focussed strategies to build on their strengths and address organisational vulnerabilities.

The overall aim of using the Resource Book is to empower small VCS organisations and community groups, to help groups help themselves. SLA recognises the multifaceted nature of VCS organisations and is dynamic in that it recognises that livelihoods are changing and adapting.







Creating an Assets Based Strategy for YOUR Group

Community Groups and VCS organisations can draw on their different assets to build a livelihood strategy, which enables them to manage and sustain their small organisations. Those organisations that have plenty of assets in all five areas will have strong strategies; probably with a number of 'back-up' plans should the primary plan fail.

For example: if we consider a typical 'reasonably comfortable' small VCS organisation, their asset base will be relatively strong — the small staff team are in good health and have relevant skills and experience (Human Assets), they own their own building and digital technology (Physical Assets) and have a relatively reliable funding stream (Financial Assets). In addition they have, strong social networks (Social Assets) and have the confidence and knowledge to hold those responsible for public services to account (Public Assets).

Conversely, those with weaker assets will often struggle to build sustainable strategies, or livelihoods. However, even those with fewer assets will often find ways to manage.

For example: a less comfortable community group might have some strong assets areas but other areas might have vulnerabilities. The community group might have a really strong skilled volunteer team (Human Assets), really good social ties within their neighbourhood (Social Assets) great links with local NHS Trusts and Local Authority (Public Assets) but only have use of a building and computer one day a week (Physical Assets), have no storage for their youth group equipment (physical assets) and only have funding for their group's activities for the next six months (Financial Assets).

This group, having identified where their assets are strongest can then use their good relationships with other community groups to may be locate storage facilities for their youth group. It can use its good relationships with public sector bodies to discuss longer term funding possibilities.

By identifying assets the group can create strategies to build on the assets and address their vulnerabilities.

We will now introduce the exercises that you might use to map your organisational assets and then to develop your group's strategy.







Top Tips for using the exercises in this Resource Book

- **1.** Invitations. Try to invite people who have different perspectives / roles that support your organisation. These people can include staff, volunteers, trustees and partner organisations.
- **2. Facilitator.** The activities are designed to be easy to understand and follow, but asking a colleague or partner organisation to facilitate a session where you work through the activities works really well.
- 3. Group Size. A good group of around ten people creates a lively discussion.
- **4.** Hand-outs. It is helpful to have hand-outs especially of each of the five assets when completing the exercises. See Appendix for hand-outs.
- **5. Exercises.** We recommend that these Exercises are used in the same order as this Book, and all in one session, for maximum benefit
- **6. Session Timings.** In our experience it takes about three hours to work through the Exercises in depth. This will of course vary according to group size.
- **7. Follow-up.** You may want to agree to meet up again with your session Facilitator maybe after a month or so to reflect on what you learned and different ideas for going forward.







1. Timeline - Where has your group come from?

This Exercise will help your group to track your group's history in order to better understand how the group has developed or changed over time, good times and difficult times. The Timeline sets up your group's history ready for the Life Spiral exercise which considers where you are now as a group

Purpose

To assess the impact of events upon your organisation over time.

What to Do

Pick a point in time that was the start of a significant period in your organisational life. Use a flipchart to mark on the Timeline key events. Moving above or below the Timeline indicates times when the organisation was 'OK' or 'not OK'.

Remember

Look for links between gaining and losing assets and impact on other aspects of organisation. For example: How did gaining funding affect your organisation? How did your group adapt to the situation?



This example shows what your organisational timeline might look like.

Map on times when things were going well and when/ if funding was lost or when new staff were taken on etc.







2. Life Spiral of a Community Organisation

The Life Spiral exercise considers where you are now as a group.

All groups and organisations go through different phases or stages as they grow and mature.

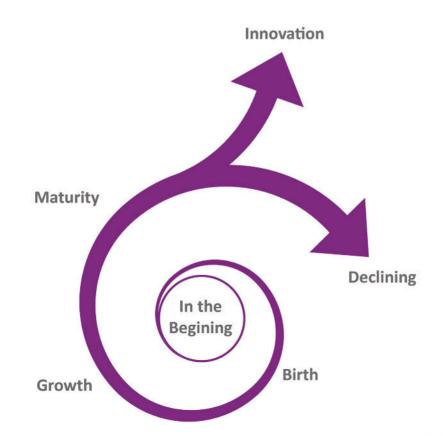
- · Which phase is your group at?
- What can you do to help your group develop further?

As you carry out this activity ask yourselves what are the goals, values, beliefs and dreams that first inspired your group? Are they still central to your group's journey? How are they evolving?

Life Spiral - What to do: (See Life Spiral Stages explained on page 12)

Look at the model and decide where your group is now. Then answer these questions on a Flip Chart

- What do you need to achieve so that your group can reach the next stage?
- · What are the opportunities that will help you do this?
- What are the risks and vulnerabilities you face, and how can they be overcome?
- What resources and assets will help your group's journey to the next stage?









Life Spiral Stages Explained

In the Beginning

- What do we want to do? Is this needed / or desired by enough people to make the effort worthwhile?
- Should we go ahead? Do we have a strong enough group to get this off the ground?
- Do we have support and interest from key stakeholders?
- What do we need to get started?

Birth

- Directions still forming need to explore many options
- Motivation we have enough drive and enthusiasm
- Are we prepared to take risks?
- Viability sufficient resources and support

Growing

- Clear direction we know where we are going
- Meeting needs and overcoming obstacles
- Strategic planning we can plan ahead
- Learning how best to meet challenges and stay fresh
- Commitment we are all together





Life Spiral Stages Explained

Maturity

- Firm Foundations good service systems in place
- Well managed and efficient
- Responsive to need in the community
- Little conflict we can deal with differences
- Few surprises we have experience of dealing with difficult situations

Innovation

- New ideas new approaches
- Willing to experiment
- Taking advantage of changes in the environment
- Renewed attention and support

Declining

- Struggling everything hard
- Purpose blurred lost sight of what we want to achieve
- Dispirited low morale danger of burnout
- No clear way ahead what are the options?
- Still meeting needs? Is our service still needed or not?
- Is recovery and renewal possible or not? What urgent steps need to be taken for revival?







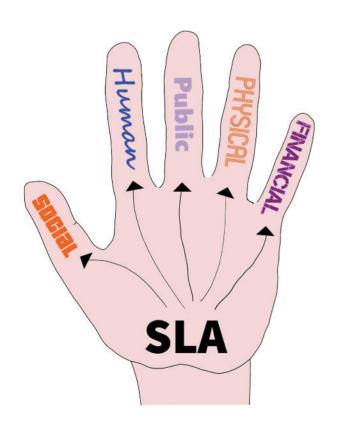
3. HANDS UP ORGANISATIONAL EVALUATION Mapping Organisational Assets

Having considered the history of your organisation and where your organisation is now, the next stage of this process is to map your organisation's assets.

Activity – Draw the hand and on each finger/thumb write down your group's assets in relation to a capital.

For example: Social Assets might be the links and ties that you have with other community groups and within the neighbourhood. Here you might list names of these groups and people.

For example: Human Assets might be the fact that your Chair of Trustees has lived in the area for twenty years and knows the history of the organisation. It could be that you have a volunteer who has studied community development. It could be that your staff are the most committed and passionate people that you have come across.



Public Social Social Assets are social links Public Assets are the relationand ties that integrate VCS ships with public groups such groups into the community as Local Authority, Universiaround them. ties, Police or NHS. Physical Human SLA Physical Assets are the tools Human Assets are the human **Assets** and equipment needed to be skills, knowledge, levels of edproductive, for example the ucation and capacity to conbuildings, space or digital tribute. infrastructure **Financial** Financial Assets are organisa tional income, access to credit, grants or savings.



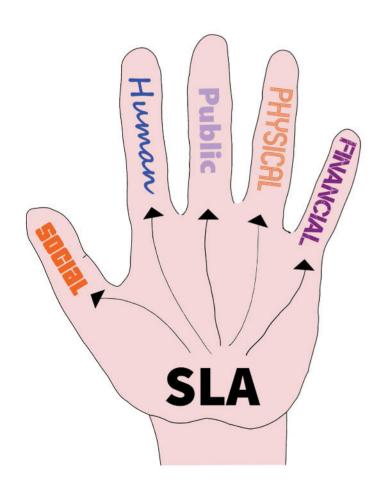


4. HANDS UP ORGANISATIONAL EVALUATION Mapping Organisational Vulnerabilities

Once you have identified your group's assets you need to then consider what might threaten these assets – what are your group's vulnerabilities.

Activity - Using post it notes stick onto each Asset any associated vulnerabilities.

For example: Human Capital - Having a trustee that has lived in the area for twenty years and has worked with the organisation long term is a real asset. But should that Trustee become unwell and have to take time off — what impact would that have on the organisation?











5. Mapping Directions – where does your organisation want to go?

Having mapped your organisation's assets and vulnerabilities you can now start to consider how you can use these assets and vulnerabilities to build your organisational strategy.

Activity - Draw out a 'Road Map' for your organisation on a flip chart. Take time to consider how you might develop your group's assets and what you might want to achieve in regards to developing each asset. Draw a roundabout with five exits. Each exit relates to one asset. Write where your organisation might like to go in relation to each asset.



For example: Public Asset - Your small VCS
organisation that works with homeless and
vulnerably housed service users might want to
further develop its public capital by linking to not just
NHS Mental Health contacts but developing new
working relationships with NHS Dentists or
Alternative Therapy Specialists.

For example: Physical Asset - Your Youth Group
might want to develop its Physical Asset and
enhance its digital presence in order to better
communicate with its service users. Your Youth
Group may wish to set up a Twitter account or create
an organisational website.





6. Creating a Sustainable Livelihoods Strategy

"SMART" Strategy Creation

You have considered the assets and vulnerabilities that your organisation faces. You have thought about the direction that your organisation might want to go in. You are now ready to consider the strategies that your organisation can use to address vulnerabilities, utilise assets and create strong organisational roots. Make these strategies "SMART" – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resourced and Timely.

ACTIVITY - Create the 'Strategy Orchard' using the design below. Write your SMART strategies in the leaves of the trees and consider how these strategies interlink by writing ties and linkages in the trees roots.

PUBLIC
FINAGIAL
FINAGIAL

For example: your youth group might have some excellent Human Assets, you might have a two or three volunteers within your youth project that are really committed experienced youth workers.

Your strategic plan might then involve investing in these volunteers, by supporting them to attend a university course. By investing in volunteers as part of your Strategic Plan, you then link Human Assets to Public Assets and Social Assets. As your volunteers will then develop links through their course with other youth work volunteers based locally and with the university. In developing their skill base at university, these volunteers will then be able to contribute to future strategic planning and funding bids, developing Financial Assets.



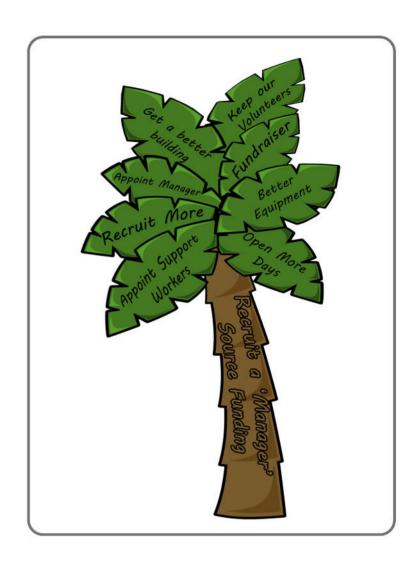




7. IDEA!

SLA involves all members of the organisation often using different and creative activities in order to build discussion.

You might create a Solution Tree to map your organisational plans







How has Assets Based Organisational Evaluation worked for other groups?

Using the Resource Book in Greater Manchester: CASE STUDIES

A pilot project took place in autumn 2015, to trial the Resource Book with small VCS groups in Hulme and Greater Manchester. This pilot project was facilitated by Eve Davidson and was supported by Manchester City Council's Growth and Neighbourhood Directorate. The Case Studies below show how assets based evaluation, using the Exercises in this Resource Book were of use to these three Case Study organisations.







Case Study One:

A Creative Arts and Crafts Project for BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) and others from deprived local communities, also assists with providing opportunities for women to set up their own businesses. The project has a wide range of achievements over a number of years. They have run many different projects and built good relationships with a wide variety of partners, including public bodies and social organisations such as schools, art galleries, museums etc.

They have also successfully recruited experienced and skilled supporters to help guide their work together with volunteers and freelancers who help with carrying out project activities. They have achieved success in obtaining funding for short-term specific projects.

The underlying problems are however:

- Lack of core funding which has meant moving to smaller temporary premises where activities cannot be carried out and this has created uncertainty with future plans
- Reliance on two staff members, so capacity is limited.
- Difficulties with both managing and then delivering activities with such a small staff team.

Their challenge is to focus on key areas without being side tracked, which can bring in revenue long term.

How the Group benefitted from the Workshop: The key priority agreed at the Workshop was to improve and develop their Strategic Plan, which should focus on a small number of activities, which can impact most on future sustainability. This should include a Vision of where the organisation wants to be in the short, medium and longer term and how best to achieve this.







Case Study 2:

A small Voluntary Group that offers support for those who have dyslexia has very dedicated volunteers, with personal experience of dyslexia, who help at drop-in sessions and IT classes. The group has been through a down period but has become very resourceful, as without premises they have developed a virtual office and kept their links with all volunteers. The group manages without equipment, funding, and a website – but are still enthusiastic and have plans going forward.

They lack funding but have found alternative ways of operating and feel that this means they have become "cost effective." However, the downside is that it is difficult for the volunteers to balance their own employment with running the group. They recognise that with funding they would be able to pay staff and pay expenses for volunteers and service users, which would help secure their future sustainability.

How the Group benefitted from the Workshop: The Workshop helped them identify that the top priority was having help with bidding for funding which will then go towards premises, activities and admin costs. They also need a new website and to find ways to encourage more people to come to drop ins. One way to raise their profile and help more people is to ensure that they are represented at community events and respond to new opportunities.





Case Study 3

A new community Library and Resource Centre offers a wide range of activities and services for the benefit of local people. They have passionate and experienced Trustees from Local Housing Association's on the board and strong support from the Local Residents Group, and also officers from the City Council. All are working together to ensure that the Centre can meet the needs of the local community now and in the future.

The building has been re-designed for community use, and despite delays with signing the lease, there is a lot of optimism that the project will be successful. They have an excellent website, and all necessary equipment. There is a need for more secure revenue funding and new sources of funding in order to cover running costs and fund necessary posts. The project is currently dependent on one worker who has too many responsibilities to be able to plan ahead. The addition of at least one paid post will make a difference to the effective running of the Centre.

A new focus on Health and Wellbeing will be the theme that will pull together activities and future direction while still giving room to manoeuvre. This will be highlighted in funding bids as it fits with what the community might want or need.

The group feels that these are "interesting and exciting times," but also "daunting and out of their comfort zone."

How the Group benefitted from the Workshop: The Workshop provided the opportunity for the group to consider how far they had come, and how best to achieve sustainability for the Centre in the future.

Their priorities are:

- To achieve funding for the new post so they can develop a strategic view.
- Take advantage of links with partners from all sectors to strengthen the operation of the Centre.
- Constantly renew their plans and activities, and measure and evaluate to ensure they are best meeting the needs of the local community.







Resources - where to find out more

Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis of VCS organisations in Greater Manchester

Davidson. E, Goldstraw. K, Packham. C (2014) "Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis: An analysis of the effects of austerity on small voluntary organisations" CAEC, MMU

www.ioe.mmu.ac.uk/caec/reports/Report_-_Sustainable_Livelihoods_Analysis_(2014).pdf

Sustainable Livelihoods Handbook - For Households

May. C, Brown. G, Cooper. N, Brill. L (2009) "The Sustainable Livelihoods Handbook: An Assets Based Approach to Poverty" Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam GB

http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-

sustainable-livelihoods-handbook-an-asset-based-approach-to-poverty-125989

Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis with Communities in Bradford

IPPR North (2011) "Community Assets First: The implications of the sustainable livelihoods approach for the Coalition Agenda" Church Action on Poverty, IPPR North, Oxfam, Urban Forum

http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/news/communityassetsfirstreport/communityassetsfirst

Recession Poverty and Sustainable Livelihoods in Bradford

Athwal. B, Brill. L, Chester. G, Quiggin. M (2011) "Recession Poverty and Sustainable Livelihoods in Bradford" Joseph Rowntree Foundation

http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/recession-poverty-and-sustainable-livelihoods-bradford

ABCD Community Development Tools

Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis for Voluntary Groups sits alongside other Assets Based Community Development Models such as ABCD.

http://www.abcdinstitute.org/







Community Resilience

This booklet offers an approach to community resilience based on Sustainable Livelihoods.

Wilding. N (2011) "Exploring Community Resilience in times of rapid change: Fiery Spirits Community of Practice" (www.fieryspirits.com), supported by Carnegie UK Trust.

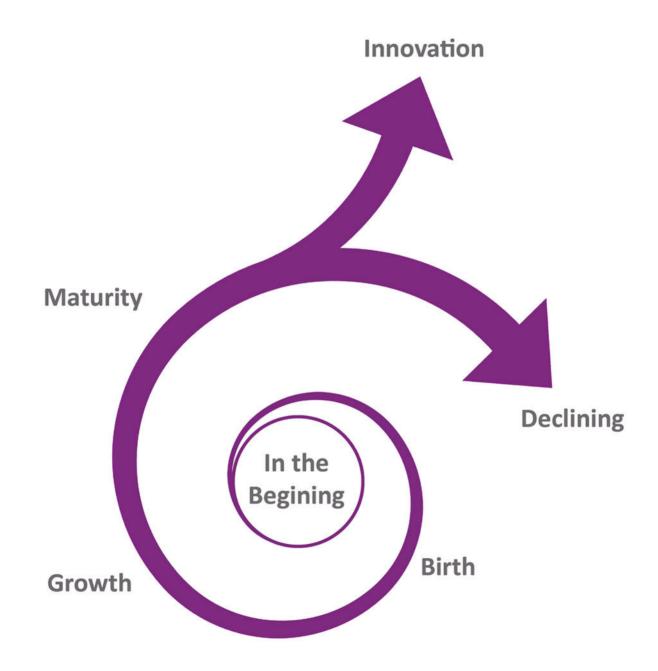
http://planh.ca//sites/default/files/exploringcommunityresilienceuk_2012.pdf





Appendix - Hand-outs

HAND-OUT ONE: LIFE SPIRAL

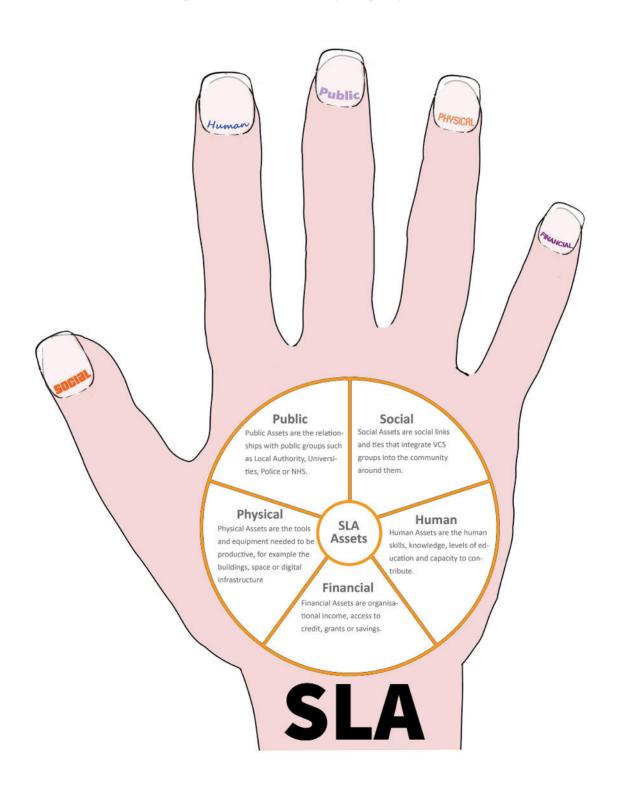






HAND-OUT 2: HAND MAPPING

Draw the hand and on each finger/thumb write down your group's assets.

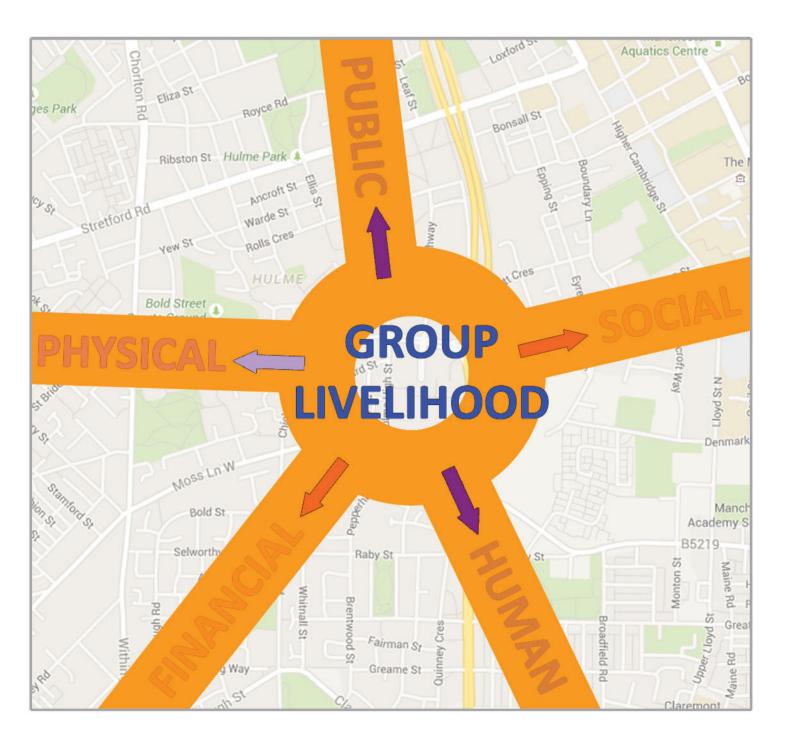


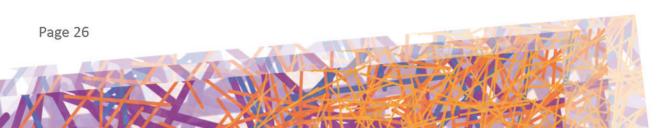




HAND-OUT 3: ROAD MAP

Draw a roundabout with five exits. Each exit relates to one asset. Write where your organisation might like to go in relation of these.



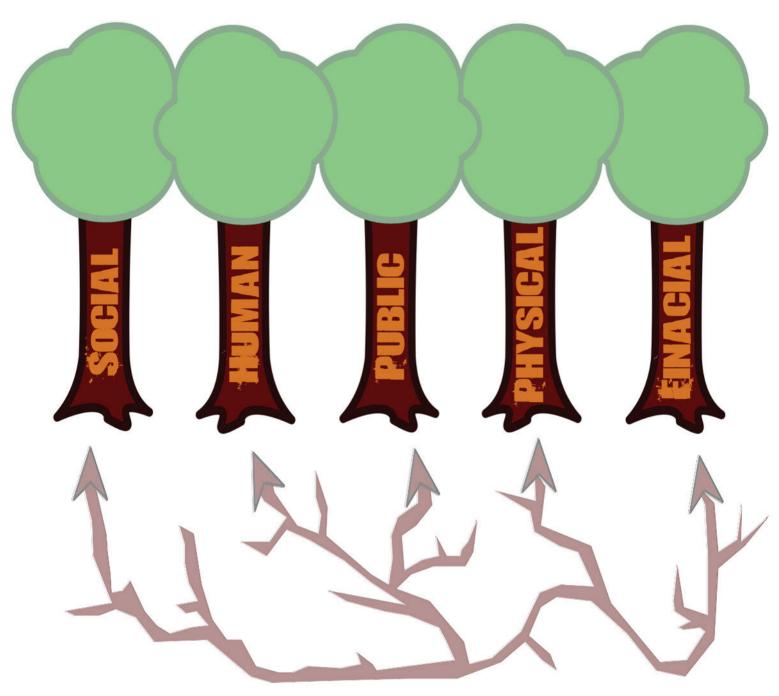






HAND-OUT 4: CREATING A SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS STRATEGY

ACTIVITY - Write your SMART strategies in the leaves of the trees and consider how these strategies interlink by writing ties and linkages in the trees roots.



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Acknowledgements

In January 2015 Julie Jarman, Church Action on Poverty, Katy Goldstraw, PHD student at MMU, CAEC researcher, owner of The Volunteer Training Company and ARVAC Volunteer, Lucy Brill, Freelance Researcher, Eve Davidson, Community Worker and CAEC Researcher, met to discuss the creation of this Resource Book.

The Resource Book was piloted at a Workshop at MMU with 27 VCS and Community group representatives in July 2015. The Workshop invited small VCS organisations to participate in an organisational level SLA. The Resource Book was then drafted into a working document and piloted with VCS groups in Greater Manchester.

Project Group 2015

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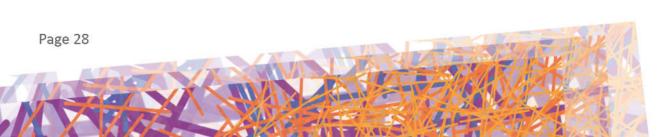














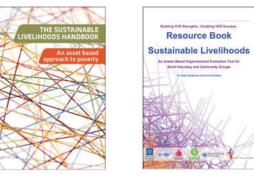


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The Project Team would like to thank Oxfam GB and Church Action on Poverty for their permission to use the "Sustainable Livelihoods Handbook" which was first published in 2009 by Oxfam GB and Church Action on Poverty. Permissions were obtained from both Oxfam GB and Church Action on Poverty to use both their logs and text for this publication. The Resource Book as a whole is protected by copyright and is published by the kind agreement of the original contributors, who have also agreed for their logos to be used. All rights are reserved.

This Resource Book is created using original text, ideas and contributions from May. C, Brown. B, Cooper. N, Brill. L, (2009) "The Sustainable Livelihoods Handbook: An Assets based approach to Poverty", Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam GB. It was first published under the title "Sustainable Livelihoods Toolkit" in 2015. The definitions of Assets and the Timeline Tool have been adapted from the 2009 "Sustainable Livelihoods

Handbook".



The Life Spiral modle has been adapted from source:

http://10thingsaboutorgdesign.blogspot.co.uk/2007/08/9-organisational-lifecycles.html and inspired by the Parabola model from Hope.A, Timmel.S (1995) "Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers," Mambo Press, Zimbabwe.

The Hand Mapping Directions, Strategy Orchard and Road Map are all creations of the Project Team.

This Resource Book sits in tandem with a research paper on Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis by Davidson. E, Goldstraw. K, Packham. C (2014) "Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis: An exploration of the Effects of Austerity on small voluntary groups in the UK," Community Audit and Education Centre, MMU.







Thank You

We hope that you have found this Resource Book useful. We look forward to continuing to work with community and voluntary groups from Greater Manchester and beyond, using this approach.

We would like to hear your comments, thoughts and experiences of using these Exercises, so that we can update the Resource Book in the future..

Do get in touch



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