The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) suggests that local government, as the level of government closest to the people, has an important role to play in facilitating opportunities for local citizens to take action on local sustainability issues (ICLEI 1997). However, it is argued that citizens and community groups will require support from local governments to be able to participate effectively. Such a capacity building role for local governments has not yet been well articulated (Cuthill 2003b, 2001; Gaventa 2001; Blaxter 2003; Wallis and Dollery 2002).

Capacity building is an ambiguous concept both in its conceptualisation and in implementation (Eade 1997). Epstein et al. (2000:2) argue that ‘it is difficult to point to a widely accepted ‘good practices framework’ either for citizens or for those attempting to engage citizens’. Nevertheless, while recent literature suggests some distinct themes that might contribute to such a framework (Cavaye 1999; Eade 1997; Jackson 2001; Kaplan 1997; Lowndes and Wilson 2001; Lyons et al. 2001), little work has been undertaken to synthesise these themes within a capacity building framework.

This article presents a synthesis of research findings drawn from a pilot study and five applied research projects focusing on the concepts and processes which underpin the operationalisation of citizen participation in local governance. However, it does not re-visit in any detail the empirical research methods and findings from these previous studies.

Rather, the approach taken in this paper is heuristic in that it draws on inductive reasoning from past experience. Readers are invited to explore in more detail, through the cited literature, results from these previous studies.

The research program was completed over a three year period from 1999 to 2002. The guiding question for this research asked, How can local governments enhance the capacity of citizens to take informed action for a sustainable local community? This guiding question was explored through the pursuit of three objectives. These were first, to identify and analyse what is required by communities to enable them to take informed action for a sustainable local community, second, to explore the role that citizen participation in local governance plays in working towards a sustainable local community; and third, to identify, analyse and implement institutional requirements within local government that will support and facilitate citizen participation in local governance.

The pilot study (Cuthill 2002a) and subsequently, five applied research projects were undertaken to explore these objectives (Cuthill 2004, 2003a, 2002b, 2001, Cuthill et al. 2004). These projects adopted an action research approach working with citizens, local community groups and local government, to test capacity building processes that might facilitate citizen participation in local governance. Building on the results from the pilot study, applied research and the literature reviewed for...
the research program, a conceptual framework describing capacity building requirements for collaborative local action for a sustainable community was developed.

The conceptual framework proposes that an emerging role for local government is to support and facilitate citizen participation in local governance through capacity building processes. As a result of this capacity building, engaged and capable citizens, and community groups are better able to participate in the planning and management of, and subsequent collaborative action on, local sustainability issues (Lyons et al. 2001). In essence, this article presents an enabling framework, through which local government can, ‘strengthen the possibility of effective democracy building ‘from below’ (Gaventa 2001:8) and promote an ongoing ‘virtuous cycle of contact … which builds community capacity … fosters community organisation and attitudes of responsibility and strategic thinking’ (Cavaye 1999:9).

This article is presented in four main sections. First, a brief philosophical context for citizen participation is described. This is followed by a discussion of literature relating to community capacity building. Next, a methodology, for collaborative local action, is presented which is based on ongoing cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection (Zuber-Skerrit 1991).

Working from this methodological model, the fourth section presents a conceptual framework for capacity building. The framework describes both local government and community capacity building requirements for achieving collaborative local action for a sustainable community. Local government capacity building requirements include i) the collection and provision of relevant empirical data describing the local community, ii) establishing equitable, accountable and transparent participatory policy and processes, and iii) the development of a supportive organisational culture. Community capacity building requirements outlined in the framework include i) enhanced citizen ability, iii) enhanced community group ability, and iii) the re/establishing of a cooperative community culture. This section discusses the potential opportunities and constraints confronting the implementation of each of the components of the framework.

Philosophical context for citizen participation

The philosophical foundation for the capacity building framework presented in this article is informed by discourses on development and democratic governance and argues that citizen participation is a basic building block for contemporary democratic society and sustainable communities. As such, citizen participation is argued to help build ‘strong local democracy’ through the development of human and social capital (Cuthill 2003b). Development of this ‘capital’, in turn, lays a platform for collaborative local action for the common good (Cox 2000).

In its broadest context the concept of citizen participation ‘is part of the wider discussion about democracy that extends over nearly 3000 years’ (Croft and Beresford 1996:181). In a contemporary context, the effectiveness of a primarily representative democracy is increasingly being challenged (Saul 1997). Bloomfield et al. (1998:8) suggest that assumptions of representative democracy, where citizens elect one of their own to represent their voice in government, ‘may have been more meaningful in smaller communities faced with relatively slow change’. Modern society is now confronted with rapid change and complex issues and there is an increasing difficulty for elected representatives to manage effectively the diverse social, environmental and economic interests of their local constituents. This suggests ‘the need to include a wider range of knowledges in decision making’ (Bloomfield et al. 1998:8) and provides a context for calls for a more participatory democracy where citizens are ‘active and engaged in the issues of the day rather than passive and withdrawn’
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(Epstein et al. 2000:9).

However, citizen participation in local governance is problematic in that it requires, to various degrees, those who ‘have’ power to devolve it to those who ‘have not’ (Cuthill 2001). Such a situation can be seen to threaten considerations of wealth, privilege and centralised governance (Crush 1995). Amalric (1998:5) argues that the adoption of a participatory approach to local governance must not be directed at control of power, rather ‘at building countervailing power’ that seeks to facilitate a collaborative approach between citizens and governments for the common good.

Therefore, an initial step in facilitating citizen participation in local governance is to build a ‘critical consciousness’ of the individuals responsibility for the common good (Freire 1970, 1973). A person who gains this critical consciousness better understands how their political, religious, gender, ethnic or educational perspectives are influenced by the dominant culture. Etzioni (1992) suggests that nearly all citizens have, at least, a latent commitment to such a responsibility. However, this citizen commitment is oftentimes tested when decision-making must attempt to balance individualistic self-interest against common good outcomes. Etzioni (1992:50) suggests that ‘Those who never experience such conflict are either born saints or utterly debased’. Intuitively, the development of an understanding of a citizen’s ethical responsibility towards the common good, facilitated through participatory processes of ‘collective reasoning and deliberation’, provides a strong basis for democratic decision-making and collaborative action (Carson and Gleber 2001:11).

It is argued that implementation of a more participatory democracy will enable people’s direct involvement in planning, decision making, resource allocation and other processes that affect their lives (Carson and Gelber 2001, United Nations Development Program [UNDP] 1997a). Participatory democracy takes the citizen role past that of merely exercising a vote which determines who will govern (Bishop 1999), to be viewed ‘as a way of life, a civic culture in which people creatively participate in public life’ (Lappe and Du Bois 1994:1). As such, they act as participants in a civil society of voluntary organisations and social networks engaging in activities which look to ‘synthesise public and private good’ (Sirianni and Friedland 1997:1). de Tocqueville (1969) argues that these associations play at least an equally important role alongside governments in determining the strength of a democracy. Amstein (1969:216) echoes this point arguing that the ‘participation of the governed in their government is, in theory, the cornerstone of democracy’. Capacity building is suggested as a means for operationalising this citizen participation.

Building the capacity of local citizens to take collaborative action for a sustainable community

Eade (1997:10) suggests that current thinking about ‘capacity building’ is most influenced by ideas ‘concerning participation, empowerment, civil society and social movements’. However, she argues that, as an approach to development, capacity building is well illustrated by four examples of ‘what it is not’. First, capacity building should not create dependency. This approach is evidenced within government projects that seek ‘to find the most expedient and efficient way to achieve a particular goal’ (Eade 1997:32). Such projects typically address short term interests and fail to develop any shared commitment for actions or provide long term strategic approaches for development.

Second, capacity building does not mean weakening the state. Democracy is not well served when governments simply pass on their responsibilities to citizens or community groups without appropriate support. Therefore, capacity building is seen as a collaborative process between government and community with each group acknowledging their roles and responsibilities.

Third, capacity building is not a separate activity. It is not something to be done ‘instead of’ providing services in areas such as health, welfare and education.
Cavaye (1999:8) strongly argues this point stating that ‘service delivery forms part of a new dual role for government that also includes the facilitation of community capacity’.

Fourth, capacity building is not solely concerned with financial sustainability. Equally important are social, environmental and political considerations of development.

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) suggest that two factors argue for a move towards a capacity building approach from governments. First, ‘historic evidence indicates that significant community development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort’ (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993:3). Second, they suggest that, in view of reduced budget allocations there is little point in waiting for extra financial support to arrive. With Australian governments increasingly committing to neo-liberal doctrines, based on the demise of the welfare state and economic rationalism (Mowbray 2003), Kretzmann and McKnight (1993:3) pragmatically advise that ‘the hard truth is that development must start from within the community … there is no other choice’.

With its complex interaction of temporal, spatial, political and social factors capacity building is an elusive process to define. Nevertheless, recent literature suggests that there are some distinct themes emerging within the discussion of capacity building. For example, Eade (1997) looks at a broad perspective of community capacity building which entails investing in people, organisations and networks. Kaplan (1997) focuses more specifically on strategic organisational capacity building, while Cavaye (1999) explores a government role in capacity building. Lowndes and Wilson (2001) discuss institutional design in local government and how this can contribute to capacity building. Lyons et al. (2001) look at the operational aspects of capacity building through an exploration of the links between participation, empowerment and sustainability, while Jackson (2001) describes a contemporary strategic approach to public involvement. Linkages between these topics are yet to be articulated clearly, however, three distinct areas of focus are evident.

First, there is development of human capital focusing on enhancing citizen skills, experiences and knowledge (Pretty 1999).

"Learning' and understanding → Changing attitudes

Good relationships

VIRTUOUS CYCLE

Community sectors and agencies as partners

People 'being heard'

Constructive communication

Figure 1. Virtuous cycle of contact between communities and public agencies (Cavaye, 1999:9)

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Second, the development of social capital looks broadly at the formal and informal relationships within and between families, community groups and governments (Putnam 1993). Third, there is a focus on the institutional ability of governments to facilitate community capacity building initiatives (Cavaye 1999; Jackson 2001). It is suggested that, collectively, this human and social capital, and institutional ability can provide a foundation for collaborative local action (Cavaye 1999; Jackson 2001; Cuthill 2003b; Lowndes and Wilson 2001). The promise of this collaboration between communities and governments is that it promotes and reinforces an ongoing ‘virtuous cycle of contact ... which builds community capacity ... fosters community organisation and attitudes of responsibility and strategic thinking’ (Cavaye 1999:9) (Figure 1). Working from Putnam’s (1993) thesis on social capital, Lowndes and Wilson (2001:630) summarise the outcomes of this citizen, community and governmental relationship whereby:

People learn to trust one another through face-to-face interaction in associations and informal social networks; norms of trust and reciprocity ‘spill over’ into society at large; a capacity is created for collective action in pursuit of shared goals; citizens expect, and representatives provide, competent and responsive government.

However, community capacity building efforts are inevitably tempered by both considerations of power (Lukes 1974) and existing government values, policies and operational processes (Lowndes and Wilson 2001). The implications of these constraints will need to be considered by governments who wish to implement meaningful capacity building frameworks. For example, a strong ‘participation’ policy stance, that acknowledges a long term commitment of effort and resources, is required.

In contrast, however, Australian governments during the 1980s and 1990s have, broadly speaking, followed the private sector focus on improving customer services when attempting to manage better the interface between government and community (Cavaye 1999; Saul 1997). This customer service focus, alongside limited resources for developmental work with communities, has sidetracked governments from developing any real commitment to a more participatory democracy. While service delivery is important, Epstein et al. (2000:11) argue that ‘citizens are much more than customers’ and should be treated as such. The dilemma of ‘citizen’ versus ‘customer’ is further expanded upon by Saul (1997:100) who argues that:

We are not customers [of government]. We haven’t walked into a shop to think about buying. We are not going to make a purchase and then walk away. We are the owners of the services in question. Our relationship is not tied to purchase or to value for money but to responsibility. Not only are we not customers of public servants, we are in fact their employers.

This statement highlights a basic philosophical difference in approach between service delivery and capacity building. While a service perspective generally looks towards fixing problems ‘for’ the community, at times an important role in itself, community capacity building is based upon a philosophy of working ‘with’ communities (Eade 1997). This latter approach focuses on a longer term strategic perspective which looks to support and enhance the existing ability, energy and knowledge of citizens. Such an approach values and embraces the diverse attributes that citizens and communities offer and works from their strengths (Wharf-Higgins 1999).

Cavaye (1999:1) argues that we cannot ignore or undervalue either government service delivery or capacity building responsibilities and that ‘government needs to develop a multiple response to the changing situation of communities’. A response focused not only on effective service delivery but one that also recognises a government role in facilitating and supporting community capacity building so that communities and government can work effectively and collaboratively, from an informed basis, for the common good.
Processes of collaborative local action

Gray (1989:232) argues that ‘the increasing interdependence of public and private organisations and the interweaving of local, national and global interests has reduced the capacity of any organisation to act unilaterally’. A collaborative approach involving a diverse range of knowledge, expertise and perspectives is required to solve these complex issues (Bloomfield et al. 1998). As its Latin roots com and laborare suggest, collaboration means to work together. Gray (1989:5) defines collaboration as a process whereby people with potentially conflicting interests ‘can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible’. Seeking common ground and creating collaborative solutions results in better outcomes for communities (Belden et al. 2001).

In light of such arguments the roles and responsibilities of both citizens and government, in local governance, can be reassessed (Cavaye 1999; Epstein et al. 2000; Healy 1998; Hoatson and Egan 2001; ICLEI 1997; Institute for Development Studies [IDS] 1996; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2001; UNDP 1997a; World Bank 1996). Arguably, we are seeing strong autocratic approaches to decision making slowly giving way to collectively negotiated processes (Cuthill 2004; Carson and Gelber 2001) which help build trust and engender commitment (Morse 1996), strengthen local democracy (Gaventa and Valderrama 1999) and provide opportunities for local governments to work better and cost less (Osborne and Gaebler 1992).

The role of government is now being redefined ‘as more than just regulator,
funder and service provider but also as a catalyst and partner with other sectors in society’ (Epstein et al. 2000:1). The following discussion describes a methodology for collaborative local action (Figure 2) based on a cyclical process of visioning, planning, action, observation and reflection (Zuber-Skerrit 1991).

This model of collaborative local action works through the central cascade of visioning, participatory planning and subsequent collaborative local action. Project outputs and process outcomes are articulated through evaluation. Evaluation leads back into visioning, whereby issues and directions are re-assessed, new planning is undertaken and so on. This perpetuates an ongoing process of collaborative local action.

Building from this model a conceptual framework for capacity building (Figure 3) articulates both citizen, community group and local government capacity building requirements to operationalise collaborative local action for a sustainable community. Rapoport (1985:256) argues that:

Conceptual frameworks are neither models nor theories … models describe how things work, whereas theories explain phenomena. Conceptual frameworks do neither; rather they help to think about phenomena, to order material, revealing patterns – and pattern recognition typically leads to models and theories.

The following section briefly discusses factors relating to the implementation of each of the components of the capacity building framework.
Establishing a community vision and well-being indicators

The success of participatory processes is dependent on the early identification and articulation of an agreed vision and goals (Ames 1997; Mega 1999). Community visioning offers a space where citizens and local government can come together to build relationships of trust and foster mutual understanding of what a sustainable local community might look like.

However, development of a community vision can be constrained by participants who enter such processes ‘with quite different, and possibly conflicting motivations and objectives’ (McArthur 1995:70). As such, a potential conflict, between participant self-interest and an ethical responsibility towards the common good, is evident. Therefore, the visioning process must seek to enhance understanding of and promote a balance between self-interest and the common good. This includes engendering trust among participants ‘mediated by awareness of others and a willingness to compromise and accommodate needs’ (Cox 2000:101). The Scottish Community Development Centre [SCDC] (2000:14) suggests that the articulation of ‘a shared vision of outcomes is therefore a precondition for good planning practice’. Community visioning also facilitates open discourse from which community well-being indicators can be developed (Young 2001; Wills 2001; Cuthill 2002b). Indicators are used to monitor progress so that informed decisions can continue to be made (Halstead 1998).

However, it is naïve to assume that the implementation of participatory processes such as community visioning will, per se, facilitate effective collaboration. To achieve this requires, first and foremost, the development of new and fundamentally different ways of thinking and working by governments (Cuthill 2003b; Cavaye 1999; Carson and Martin 1999; Warner 2001).

Figure 4 Citizen participation in local governance as a foundation for re/building social capital, strengthening democratic governance and facilitating sustainable community outcomes

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Local government requirements: Developing institutional capacity in local government to facilitate and support citizen participation in local governance

The Commonwealth Foundation (1999:82) suggests that ‘participation in governance for a good society requires direct connection between citizens and the state’. However, the role of local government in facilitating citizen participation in local governance is not well defined and there is a need to understand local government requirements in this area better (Gaventa and Valderrama 1999; Cuthill 2001, 2003b; Carson and Gelber 2001). Recent literature suggests that the development of local government policies and processes that facilitate and support citizen participation in local governance will, in return, provide positive returns to citizens, communities and local governments (Blaxter et al. 2003; Cuthill 2003b; Gaventa, 2001; Aimers 1999; Schachter 1997; Whittaker 1996; Knight et al. 2002; Davis 2001; UNDP 1997a).

For example, citizen participation in local governance can facilitate increased community support for government decisions (Creighton 1992), the development of broad-based ownership of community issues (Gore 1992) and strengthen the legitimacy and standing of government (Amalric 1998; Williams 1998). Other research suggests that citizen participation in local governance provides a foundation for achieving sustainable community outcomes (Lyons et al. 2001; Cuthill 2002a; Smith et al. 1999; Willms 2000; ICLEI 1997; United Nation Conference on Environment and Development [UNCED] 1993). Furthermore, Lowndes and Wilson (2001:638) argue that ‘the design of local political institutions is a crucial variable in determining whether social capital becomes an actual, rather than a potential, resource for democracy and governance’.

While discussion on social capital is still in the early stages, it is argued that high levels of social (and human) capital in communities can provide positive social, economic and democratic outcomes which contribute to community well-being (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2000; OECD 2000; La Jolla Institute 1999; Knack & Keefer 1997; World Bank 1999; Willms 2000). For example, Putnam (1993:37) argues that ‘social capital embodied in norms and networks of civic engagement seems to be a precondition for economic development as well as for effective government’. Such outcomes suggest a self-reinforcing process whereby local governments who support and facilitate citizen participation in local governance help re/build social capital, strengthen democratic governance and facilitate sustainable community outcomes (Figure 4).

The studies undertaken for this research program identified three areas where institutional capacity can be built to enable local government better to implement a participatory philosophy of working with local community. These include:

i) the collection and provision of relevant empirical data describing the local community,

ii) establishing equitable, accountable and transparent participatory policy and processes, and

iii) the development of a supportive organisational culture.

These requirements are described in the following discussion.

The collection and provision of relevant empirical data describing the local community from which collaborative local action can be planned

Kurland and Zeder (2001:3) argue that ‘community empowerment implies that coalitions must have access to all information relevant to designing appropriate programs and assessing their merits’. Equitable access to relevant social, environmental and economic information for all participants is essential in helping to balance ‘power’ considerations within a collaboration. In addition, the quality of information is important as a range of valid and reliable data feeding into the
collaborative process lays a foundation for good planning and decision-making.

While public meetings and surveys are common data collection methods traditionally used by many local governments in Australia, there is also a diverse menu of innovative participatory approaches available to choose from (e.g., Carson and Gleber 2001; Carson and Martin 1999; Wates 2000; Ames 1993; Cuthill 2004). For example, citizen juries, community visioning, consensus conferences, citizen-initiated referendums and search conferences, all provide an opportunity to extend existing local government data collection efforts. Such methods introduce a rich citizen perspective into local governance processes which can complement the oftentimes quantitative focus of more traditional research methods.

Establishing equitable, accountable and transparent participatory policy and processes

Local government commitment to participatory processes may be articulated through corporate planning initiatives, such as the development of a participation charter, a policy statement outlining corporate intent and direction, strategy development outlining how a Council will achieve such intent, and financial planning including resource commitments to implement community capacity building initiatives.

From an operational perspective, four inter-dependent factors, which underpin the implementation of local government participatory philosophy, were identified (Cuthill 2001). These are the development of:

- a standardised and equitable means of identifying stakeholders in a participation process;
- decision support systems to provide open and accountable processes for integrating citizen and community group perspectives into local government planning and decision making;
- a community capacity building program which facilitates citizen participation through provision of funding, training for staff and community, and information and expertise to support community efforts (this local government initiative directly links to local community requirements and is discussed later); and
- project and process evaluation to measure, monitor and validate institutional and community capacity building initiatives.

Developing a supportive organisational culture for citizen participation within local government

In some respects emergence of a cultural change might be seen as a logical flow on from implementing the two previously discussed local government requirements. However, the experience of this research suggests that a lack of trust, between community and local government must also be addressed in order to build a local government culture which supports and facilitates citizen participation in local governance. A general lack of trust of governments has been documented at local community (Cuthill, 2004, 2002b) and national (Yencken and Porter 2001) levels in Australia, and in international research (Knight et al. 2002).

While the empirical results from this research program do not conclusively link this lack of trust with issues of power, there is an intuitive logic that this is so. Furthermore, it is well documented that issues of power do influence attempts to introduce a more participatory democracy (Epstein 2000; Etzioni 1992; Saul 1997; Lukes 1974; Alinsky 1972; Freire 1970). Therefore, addressing these issues of power, in this case evidenced through lack of trust, becomes a critical component of the cultural change process. Further research is required in this area.

Linking local government and community requirements through capacity building

Citizens and community groups will have opportunities to become involved in local
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governance if the three identified requirements for institutional capacity are addressed within local governments. Such initiatives will help facilitate a meeting place between ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ approaches, where lessons drawn from practice are used to inform and influence policy development (SCDC 2000). However, just as local governments are currently lacking certain capacities to facilitate effective participatory processes, so too are citizens and community groups. Clearly, local governments can contribute to building the capacity of citizens and/or community groups, by enhancing their skills, knowledge, operations or resources, in order to enable them to participate effectively in collaborative local action.

Local community capacity building requirements
Three key areas where citizens and/or community groups may require support to assist their effective participation are identified in the conceptual framework (Figure 3). These include:

i) enhancing citizen ability,

ii) enhancing community group ability,

and

iii) re/establishing a cooperative community culture.

Citizen ability
The development of human capital, through the enhancement of citizens’ skills and knowledge, provides a building block for collaborative local action (Pretty 1999; Kaplan 1999). However, local governments find themselves constrained, by both available resources and expertise, in what they can achieve in building human capital. For example, it is unrealistic to expect that local governments can work individually with each and every citizen on a one to one basis. Other methodologies, such as a strengths based approach, which focuses on the diverse abilities existing within a community, supported by community based training during the participatory process, will help ensure that required skills and knowledge are attained (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). Alongside the requirement for appropriate skills and knowledge development for individuals, there is a need for effective organisational management within community groups.

Community group ability
Community groups comprise a complex interaction of different people with diverse priorities and perspectives. A coherent and consensual organisational view on why the group exists, what it trying to achieve and how they will go about doing this will help manage this complexity (Kaplan 1999). If not, tensions within the organisation and the strain on limited resources impede organisations ability to contribute effectively to collaborative local action. Kaplan (1999) argues that ineffective community groups tend to focus on the more tangible, operational aspects of their efforts without sufficient discussion and articulation of the underlying organisational vision, goals and strategies. As resources for implementing community based development work are scarce, available resources must be used effectively (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993).

Strategic planning provides community groups with an important tool for achieving effective organisational management (Centre for Community Enterprise 1999; Beckwith and Lopez 1997). This helps ensure that a community group does not stumble from one crises to the next, and is well placed to manage change pro-actively (Kaplan 1997). Using this approach, groups will be able to ‘look critically at past actions, take out what is of value, put aside what is not of value, and use the resulting analysis to inform future action’ (Kaplan 1989:2). This reflective learning informs ongoing processes of planning and action (Cuthill et al. 2004).

Discussion so far has briefly focused on the enhancement of both citizen and community group ability to contribute effectively to participatory processes. However, at both inter-organisational and cross-sectoral levels, a ‘competitive’ environment has constrained groups wishing to undertake collaborative local action (Hoatson and Egan 2001).
Re-establishing a cooperative community culture

Collaboration between community groups, and between these groups and various levels of government, provides opportunities to maximise resources, share information and learning and supportive relationships that help citizens to survive in a rapidly changing world (Hoatson and Egan 2001). However, ‘a policy environment expecting competitive and collaborative practices to comfortably co-exist has posed considerable difficulties for agencies’ (Hoatson and Egan 2001:8). Limited resources must be fought for to ensure groups can continue working. This has stressed relationships between community groups and engendered a protective approach to information sharing and collaboration (Hoatson and Egan 2001). A competitive environment has caused potential partners to work behind closed doors.

An added issue relating to the current competitive culture is that it fails ‘to recognise that social relationships and social bonding are both necessary and central to our quality of life and our economic prowess’ (Cox 2000:102). This suggests that a competitive culture has hindered the development of social capital. Conversely, a cooperative culture based on constructive, open dialogue, and the development of trusting and collaborative relationships is argued to contribute to rebuilding social capital. In addition, such dialogue and relationships are essential for re-establishing understanding and acceptance of the common good within local communities (Latham 2001).

To re-establish cooperation as a cultural norm within community will require considerable time and commitment, both across community groups, and between community and local government (Hoatson and Egan 2001). It is suggested that commitment from local government, to increased and meaningful citizen participation in local governance, can contribute to rebuilding a cooperative culture within local communities. Some initiatives local government could adopt are to:

- encourage, support and sustain the skills, commitment and enthusiasm within community groups;
- help ensure resources directed to community issues are used effectively;
- ‘help develop a local ‘sense of identity and place’ through the sharing of stories and experiences about working and living in a community; and
- assist citizens and community groups to develop a collective voice for the common good thereby enhancing their ability to act as strong advocates for their community.

Summary of local community requirements

Local governments can provide valuable support to enhance both the abilities of

**Figure 5 Establishing locus of control for collaborations**
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citizens and community groups, and facilitate the re-establishment of a cooperative culture within community. Such measures provide opportunities to citizens and community groups to empower themselves to play a prominent role with local government in tackling the issues confronting their community (Lyons et al. 2001). This is an ongoing process whereby 'levels of social capital are produced and reproduced in cyclical, repetitive processes of social interaction and formal governance' (Cox 2000:105).

Collaborative local action

Collaborative local action is the visible expression of that community and local government relationship. For example, a collaborative approach promotes community and local government dialogue where stakeholders come together 'to deliberate about and decide the important matters facing joint lives as citizens in a community' (Morse 1996:15). Himmelman's (1995) dichotomy of collaborations describes 'empowerment' or 'betterment' approaches to collaboration.

The betterment approach involves community being 'invited into a process designed and controlled by larger institutions' whereas the empowerment approach 'begins within the community itself' and involves other stakeholders as the collaboration evolves (Morse 1996:10). To facilitate a meeting place for each specific collaboration requires that stakeholders negotiate 'up-front about who is driving the collaboration' (Morse 1996:10), thereby establishing an appropriate locus of control for that collaboration (Figure 5).

Such an approach acknowledges a pragmatic reality in that the power within any collaboration will depend on contextual factors such as the abilities, commitment and intention of those people involved, the nature of the collaboration, the issues to be addressed, and the time and resources available to stakeholders (Morse 1996). These influencing 'contexts' form the basis of negotiation for each collaboration.

Collaborative processes inevitably place heavy demands on both the time and resources of stakeholders. Nevertheless, successful collaboration can facilitate positive outcomes for a community and local government, returning dividends on resource investments (Amalric 1998; Belden et al. 2001; Claridge and Claridge 1997; Healy 1998; Hoatson and Egan 2001). However, these benefits have not been well articulated through evaluation. This lack of evaluation has constrained any broad acceptance of a more collaborative approach to local governance (Hoatson and Egan 2001).

Evaluation

Two distinct but interrelated results are evident from collaborative local action. These are 'process outcomes' and 'project outputs'. Arguably, evaluation of community development and community service initiatives has traditionally focused largely on project outputs. These outputs are relatively easy to evaluate as they are evidenced as the result of specific operational or capacity building initiatives. Evaluation focusing on 'project outputs' provides accountability for public resources relating to specific actions, and establishes a sound empirical basis from which the next cyclical stage of collaborative local planning and action can be entered.

Process outcomes are less tangible and are closely related to the development of human and social capital (Cox 2000; SCDC 2000). Social capital, in this paper developed through citizen participation in local governance, is suggested as the glue that holds communities together (Cox 1995). Evaluation of these process outcomes places a value on the development of human and social capital, and provides explicit recognition that 'how' we do things is often as important as 'what' we do.

Evaluation of process outcomes also provides an opportunity for participant reflection (Drysdale and Purcell 1999). In this context reflection refers to a process of continuous learning where understanding gained through experience is made explicit. Leal and Opp (1999:14) argue that 'through collective self-reflection on their
experiences and problems, people become more aware of the dimensions of their reality and of what can be done to transform it. Reflective practice is a key factor in creating learning communities (North Central Regional Center for Rural Development [NCRCRD] 1999).

Following the participatory theme of this paper, there is an evolving focus in the literature that promotes a participatory approach to evaluation (Guba and Lincoln 1989; Coupal and Simoneau 1997; Drysdale and Purcell 1999; Kaplan 1989; NCRCRD 1999; SCDC 2000; UNDP 1997b; World Bank 1996). Participatory evaluation is people centred with participants situated as the key actors of the evaluation process and not the mere objects of the evaluation (UNDP 1997b). Project participants are identified not as merely providers of information rather as active participants who are involved in and learn from the evaluation dialogue. Through participatory evaluation, the diverse range of perspectives, knowledge, values, needs and abilities of stakeholders are acknowledged and provide direction to the evaluation.

The challenge is to develop evaluation processes that facilitate desired outcomes in reflective learning, provide valid and reliable data for ongoing planning and decision making processes, contribute to open and accountable governance, and produce information that is used in policy and program development. However, it is important to balance these evaluation outcomes against the ever increasing reporting requirements that threaten to overwhelm community groups and their collaborative initiatives.

Conclusion

When undertaking community capacity building, local governments will need to focus on building the ‘skills, knowledge, experience, leadership and managerial capabilities’ of citizens, community groups and public officials to participate in local governance processes (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000:8). In addition, it will require the ‘opening up’ of community access to the political and economic systems that are the basis of power in modern communities (LeCompte and deMarrais 1992). Participation and collaboration both imply a standard of equity between citizens and local government. However, the practical realities of achieving this are uncertain and should remain a key factor in future research. While many local, state and commonwealth governments in Australia have, to some degree, indicated a commitment to sharing power in decision making, the reality of implementing this rhetoric is still to be determined.

This paper presents a conceptual framework for capacity building which describes what is required from both local community and local government to achieve collaborative local action for a sustainable community. The components of the framework have been discussed in a general context in order to synthesise the more detailed discussion presented in previous papers. The central argument of the paper is that citizen participation in local governance operationalised through capacity building acts as a catalyst, in a self-reinforcing process, that strengthens democratic governance, helps re/build social capital and provides a foundation for citizens and local government to work collaboratively towards a sustainable community.

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