

SCDN's response to EHRC's Inquiry of January 2018

Introduction to SCDN

“The Scottish Community Development Network (SCDN) is a member led organisation, for community workers/ community development workers, paid or unpaid, full or part time, from the community, voluntary or public sectors, who support the principles and practice of community development. SCDN is open to anyone with an interest in community development in Scotland.

Our mission is to be a strong, dynamic organisation, which provides a forum for community development practitioners, paid or unpaid, to share experiences, exchange information, discuss and debate practice and policy issues, within a framework which seeks to empower communities.”

We have over 400 members and work closely with

- CDAS-Community Development Alliance Scotland
- SCDC-Scottish Community Development Centre
- IACD-International Association for Community Development
- CLDSS –Community Learning and Development Standards Council for Scotland
- Local authority and Third Sector Partners

We are members and active participants of, for example, Learning for Sustainability Scotland, University of Edinburgh, which is the centre for learning for Sustainable Development, UN Sustainable Development Goals and Action Plan for Scotland. Community development is a central pillar to the delivery of the sustainable development goals and human rights and equality are key elements of achieving these goals.

Community Development Practice therefore sits within a national and international context. Equality and human rights is central to the role of practitioners supporting and empowering communities. Community Development Practitioners can be located within public and

voluntary sector and SCDN's membership reflects the diversity of roles within its membership across Scotland.

SCDN agrees fully with the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) definition of Community Development : 'it **plays** a crucial **role** in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of **disadvantaged** and **vulnerable** communities. It has a set of core values/social principles covering human rights, social **inclusion**, **equality** and **respect for diversity**; and a specific **skills** and **knowledge** base'.

SCDN supports work underway in respect of the Scottish National Action Plan on Human Rights as a tool at a national and local level to gauge progress and monitor how Human Rights and rights based approaches are being applied in practice. This needs to remain along with maintaining and raising the role of organisations like the Scottish Human Rights Commission, ongoing learning and development, training and awareness raising along with campaigns to keep the focus on embedding policy in practice.

This will become all the more important in view of the uncertainty around Brexit. In or out of the EU we need to maintain and protect human rights and equality legislation, policy and practice in Scotland through our existing devolved powers and campaign in respect of transferring the powers from the EU into legislation across UK and devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Participation & Engagement

Q. How the Scottish Parliament can empower people to make them more aware of their rights under domestic and international human rights law and to help build a strong human rights culture in Scotland?

According to Liberty's polls (Liberty's briefing on the Human Rights Act and the Government's proposal for its repeal) an overwhelming majority of the population are in favour of keeping the Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998, even when they were provided with minimal information about it.

Community development practice facilitates and supports collective action which enables the most disadvantaged communities to achieve some of the most basic human rights.

One example of CD practice which enshrines human rights and equalities values, is work with refugee and asylum seeking women. CD has supported the development of a strong voice for refugee women, through the Refugee Women's Strategy Group who have played a key role in representing the human rights and gender issues that affect refugee and asylum seeking women in Scotland, engaging with decision makers and service providers to influence policy and practice with a view to improving the quality of life for this disenfranchised group.

CD practitioners provide skilled and value based support for the most disadvantaged communities, including equalities groups and neighbourhoods experiencing the harshest impacts of the current austerity measures of the UK government.

Exclusion from society can be a cause of substance use and substance use can be a cause of exclusion. The right to life and freedom from discrimination regards this right should be a primary concern. Community development supports communities to challenge discrimination and to understand the root causes of inequalities and social injustice.

Any strategy to raise awareness of Human Rights needs to include schools.

The continued development and promotion of Political Literacy type learning and classes, with a focus on Human Rights could help to raise overall awareness of politics. This could be used as a starting point to build on.

We would therefore recommend:

- Recognition and investment in community development, working at grass roots level with the most disadvantaged communities, who are most at risk of human rights abuses.
- Investment in a structured training programme in human rights (especially HRA 1998 and UDHR 1948) and its implications in ordinary people's everyday life
- Consider creation of road show awareness raising workshops that could be used as part of the current PSE timetables within secondary schools, could be one possible starting point
- Consider the development of on line, interactive app to engage, promote and encourage greater dialogue amongst young people

- Align the functional role of Community Development practice more closely to The Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015, as it is abundantly clear the practice of CD in the application of human rights has important implications for, amongst others, health, housing and community. The Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015 aims to empower communities through strengthening their voices in decisions about public services, empowering them with new rights to request action on local needs and actions, and extending their rights to control land and buildings.

Parliamentary procedure and process

Q. What further steps the Scottish Parliament could take to ensure that people's human rights are being taken into consideration when the Scottish Government and public authorities are creating policies?

SCDN believes that the Human Rights Act is of paramount importance and that has protected the rights of a large number of vulnerable British citizens for the past 20 years.

We welcome Scottish Parliament's recognition of the widening inequalities across the UK and the increasing vulnerability of some of the most disadvantaged groups as a result of the UK government's austerity policies. We also welcome the steps to include the BME, especially women in their decision making process.

Currently in Scotland about 7-10% of the population suffer from a dependency on alcohol. People in recovery from alcohol will avoid areas, people or events that could provide temptation and lead to relapse. This is a real problem for people recovering from problematic alcohol use because of the ubiquity and omni-presence of alcohol, alcohol advertising and use of alcohol in social situations. As a result, people can become disenfranchised from civic events that involve alcohol.

Recommendations:

- Recognition and Secured investment in community development practitioners, working at grass roots level with the most disadvantaged communities, who are most at risk of human rights abuses.

Accountability

Q. What more could the Scottish Parliament do to ensure that the international treaties, for example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other human rights obligations are being followed in Scotland

There are real dangers with the Great Repeal Bill, which threatens future devolved powers in Scotland. As such it is crucial that Scotland has strong legislation, policy and processes in

place to protect human rights and equalities. Working with key community based organisations, representing the interests of those furthest away from decision making as well as recognising the value of work which empowers disadvantaged communities is an important element of accountability.

This requires the most disadvantaged communities to have access to skilled, knowledgeable and value based community development support.

Recommendations:

- Recognition and investment in community development, working at grass roots level with the most disadvantaged communities, who are most at risk of human rights abuses.
- Ensure consulting /engaging with a diverse and representative cross section of the public. Working parties or consulting groups have a balance between 'experts' and general public (with equal voting rights in respect to decisions).