



Asset based community development in mountain environs: a strategic application for sustainable community based tourism development in the Jaunsar-Bawar region of Uttarakhand, India

Prakash Chandra Rout
Ph.D. Research Scholar
H.N.B. Garhwal University (A Central), India
Email: pcrorissa@gmail.com, Mob: +977 9861888376

and
Professor S.K. Gupta
H.N.B. Garhwal University, India

Abstract

Asset based community development has been discussed a length for the last decade. It is considered to be a novel approach and has become instrumental for many communities to improve their socio-economic status. Communities subsist in the Himalayan uplands and are generally in search of innovate livelihood opportunities given their existing exceptional natural and heritage assets. Tourism development on a local scale can benefit the communities in the region if opportunities to do so are vigorously pursued. This research briefly explores the different dimensions of asset based community development by taking the notion of the local community as its core. Community based tourism has intersected with an asset based community development approach and now represent the potential benefits that can be gained by the entire region of Jaunsar-Bawar. A qualitative research paradigm based upon conceptual analysis was used in the paper and discusses the diverse phenomenon of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) through inceptive and conceptual paradigms. The research suggests a way forward to support the development of mountain communities which possess a wide range of existing natural and cultural assets in the Himalayan landscape of Jaunsar-Bawar.

Keywords: Asset based community development, community based tourism, tourism development, community development, India.

Introduction

Lately, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) has grabbed the attention of community development practitioners around the world as an innovative strategy for community-driven development in urban and rural neighborhoods (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Over many decades, top-down development approaches have not been able to deliver real and sustainable development outcomes for the masses in the context of developing countries, thus providing an impetus and a need to search for alternative development approaches. The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach is one of the approaches that is not only a 'people centered' one, but also a 'citizen-driven' one (Fuimaono, 2012). The approach of Asset-Based Community Development was propounded by John L. McKnight and John P. Kretzmann as a challenge to traditional solutions to urban problems, which focus on the needs and deficiencies of neighborhoods (The ABCD Institute, 2008). The needs-based approach defines poverty as the absence or lack of the basic elements required for human survival (Booy, Sena & Arusha, 2000).



Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a strategy for sustainable community driven development. ABCD is in the main concerned with how to link micro-assets in a community to the macro-environment. The beauty of ABCD lies in its foundational notion that communities can drive the development process themselves. In order to do this they need to recognize and marshal existing, but what are very often unrecognized assets. In so doing they can forge local economic opportunities to bolster communities.

Firstly, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) argued that development planners and policy makers did not map a community that possesses numerous assets and untapped growth potential, but perceived a place of deprivation, crisis, hunger, injustice, drought and poor sanitation. They no longer observe the capacities that are inherited in the real landscape of an area; all they see is what they do not have.

Secondly, when this mental map infects the collective mindset of community members, they start to believe that their environs are no longer a barren landscape, bereft of productive capacity or value, which can only be developed by external assistance such as by paving the way for experts who will come to 'fix their brokenness, fill their emptiness, and cure them of their maladies' (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2002; Green, Moore & O'Brien, 2006). Such external dependency does not build strong communities in any sense, nor, by extension, the development of a strong civil society. Thus, the needs-based model transgresses a central tenet of community development: communities are built from the inside out and not from the outside in (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

Lastly over-dependence on outside investment and services will always result in some level of dissatisfaction since communities, by definition, are places where people who live in them, build their own sense of common identity, through acts of caring, cooperation, connection, association and shared problem-solving with other with wo they share a space.

In contrast to the needs-based approach that largely depends upon outside experts and resources to meet their deficiencies, asset-based community development genuinely empowers citizens and strengthens government and promotes agency effectiveness by drawing on local communities' resources, abilities, and insights to solve their own problems (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). ABCD aims to empower community members to identify their own assets and envisage ways they can use them to meet their own needs and the needs of their broader community (Haines & Green 2012). ABCD facilitates the formation of new tales and senses that help communities to recognise their strengths, challenging problematic constructions of places (or people) as being deficient and worthless (Ennis & West 2010; Bankoff, 2001).

Communities are not viewed as multifaceted masses of needs and problems, but are rather viewed as miscellaneous and powerful bases of useful assets. Every community has a basket of unique skills and capacities to promote community development (Peters, 2013). Individuals are at the core as they have skills which can be useful but these must first be identified. In addition there are associations of small informal groups of people who work with a common interest. There are also valuable institutions represented by people who are professionals such as state institutions. The physical assets including for example land, buildings, and funds are also important useful assets (Hipwell, 2009).

There are also critical linkages or connections made by people through the building of solid relationships between individuals. Fundamental in ABCD is the emphasis on social relationships



and the social capital that can be gained. All formal and informal associations, networks, and especially extended families as opposed to nuclear families, are treated as valuable assets. ABCD upholds the idea that involvements by external sources will be very effective when a community's assets are leveraged at their full capacity (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

For over three decades, community based tourism has been promoted as a means of development whereby the economic, social and environmental needs of local communities are met through the offering of a tourism product of sorts (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). It is a more sustainable form of tourism as opposed to mass tourism, since it allows the destination communities to avoid the hegemony and control of external forces such as wealthy operators and elite groups who tend to dominate proceedings (Timothy, 2002). According to Fitton (1996: 173), community-based tourism is then developed in accordance with the "needs and aspirations of host communities in a way that is acceptable to them, sustains their economies, rather than the economies of other, and is not detrimental to their culture, traditions or, indeed, their day-to-day convenience".

Paradoxical status of mountain environs

Mountains cover almost one-quarter of the world's land surface (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), 2011) and directly support 22 percent of the world's people who live within the mountain region (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2002). Mountains are the natural reservoir of water, energy, agricultural and a wide range of forest products. As centres of biological and cultural diversity, religion and recreation, mountains are important for at least half of humanity (Messerli & Ives, 1997). People living in these 'complex lenses' are the poorest, heavily disadvantaged and the most vulnerable in society. Climate change, population growth, deforestation and exploitative agricultural practices are constantly threatening their life to subsist in the uplands (Ginkel, 2004). Mountain communities are economically sagged, socially marginalised and politically unprivileged and far away from the mainstream development as is evidenced by their lack of basic human needs (Gupta & Rout, 2016). The painstaking efforts made through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has not brought any significant changes on mountain issues and no real tangible results. Constraints to alleviating poverty, averting environmental degradation and attaining sustainable development in these regions are significantly meagre to say the least. Various transformative steps have been taken on the global level like Agenda 21 Chapter 13 (Rio-1992) to mitigate specific challenges of mountain people.

Several mountain policies undertaken through the International Year of Mountains (IYM-2002) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD-2002) were framed to support mountain development. However most of these downstream perspectives, policies and steps are criticised due to their failure to resolve specific challenges related to mountain livelihoods and local development in recent times (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 2011). Therefore, the mountain communities are on the lookout for a sustainable developmental agenda to eradicate their endemic poverty and seek to build a strong social capital base for their long-term growth and ultimately their survival.

Literature

The social movement in the name of community development, has been a fast-increasing industry since the mid-twentieth century (Vidal, 1997). The field of community development emerged with the mission of addressing and alleviating poverty in low-income and minority communities around



the world. This mission was set up upon the realization of the strong relationship between poverty and underdevelopment (Vidal, 1997). Community development includes several processes where community members come together and take collective actions to achieve economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the community (Buckley, 1999). Eradication of poverty and community development became more interdependent goals after they were highlighted by the United Nations (UN, 2000) and as goals number one and eight respectively, in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Khadka, 2012).

Strategies of community development are at present viewed as the remedy for poverty and poverty related problems. Therefore, community development strategies became vital to people's well-being, and touch everyone in the community (Assaad & Rouchdy, 1999). The strategies used to deal with poverty and welfare communities transforming them into more humanized and livable places, are mostly needs-focused. They are usually driven from traditional development approaches to ultimate development such as aid, needs based and rights based approaches (Nagi, 2001).

The traditional needs-based approach, depends on the expertise and fund of the outsiders. Despite this, it is considered to be hugely progressive when compared to the charity model, because it generates an active communication between the donors and the beneficiaries (Roehlkepartain, 2005). It seems that a needs based approach to development is unable to address policies and regulations that could lead to the radical change that is required (Uvin, 2007). It defines the community by its problems and these generally require outside expertise, resources and funding in order to be solved (Roehlkepartain, 2005). Besides, a needs based strategy discourages people from participating on a higher community development level, and turns them into passive consumers with no motivation to be producers (Boyd et al, 2008). ABCD is a pathway that gradually marches toward the development of policies and activities based on the capacities, skills and assets of lower income people and their neighborhood offerings (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993).

As an innovative approach, the appeal of ABCD lies in its premise that communities can drive the development process themselves by uncovering, identifying and mobilizing existing assets, and empowering people through their participation. Hence, it provides a radical remedy for poverty. In particular, ABCD gives attention to human, natural, physical, financial and social assets, and thereby creating sustainable economic opportunity (Boyd et al, 2008). An asset-based community development (ABCD) approach was used in a study by Wu and Pearce (2014) conducted in Lhasa, Tibet. This explored the latent value of the ABCD approach to tourism development as an important poverty alleviation strategy.

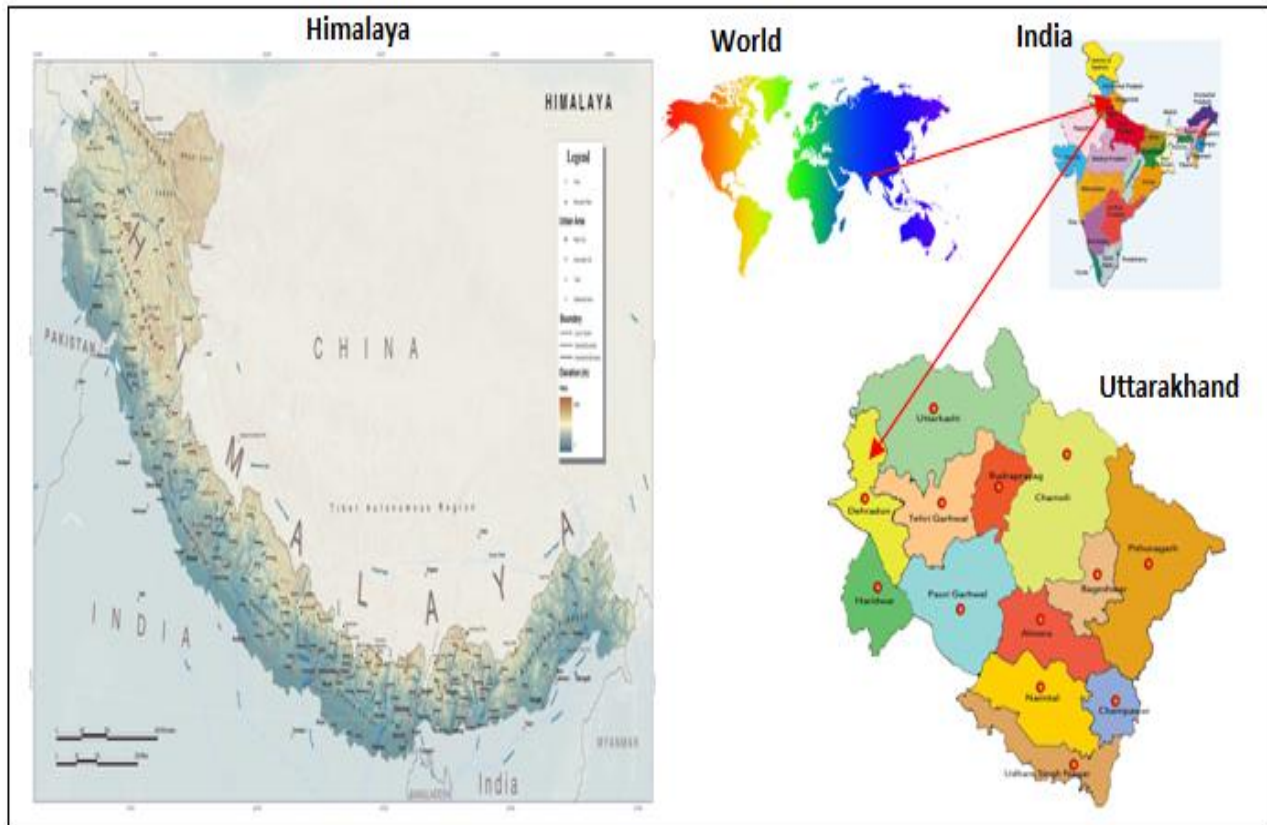
The study found that young Tibetan hosts had a very good working knowledge of local assets and they were able to identify five groupings of local assets as having what they considered to be the most potential to be developed as tourism attractions. These assets included existing world heritage sites, a number of undeveloped areas such as religious sites, traditional Tibetan yards, daily life and customs in the community, and Tibetan medicines (Wu & Pearce, 2014).

The study area

Jaunsar-Bawar, the wonderful scenic region is situated in the cis-Himalayas forming the northern half of the district Dehradun in the Indian state of Uttarakhand. It lies between north latitude 30°31" and 31°3' 30" and East longitude 77°45' and 78°7'20". Even after having huge potential for tourism development, the tourism in the study area is still in the nascent stage due to the lack of poorly developed tourism products and the poor linkages of the tourism sector with other interrelated sectors of the local economy, ultimately resulting in a lower distribution of the benefits among the

community members. This is further leading to loss of interest among locals in being a part of any tourism development initiatives.

Image 1: Map of the Study Area



Source: University of Yale and Cambridge and Google Image

The region with its vast natural, cultural and physical resources is in urgent need of a suitable developmental approach to strengthen its overall mountain environs and make them more enticing for visitors. Therefore, asset based tourism development in the region can play a pivotal role for community upliftment, and hence the need for this research to be undertaken.

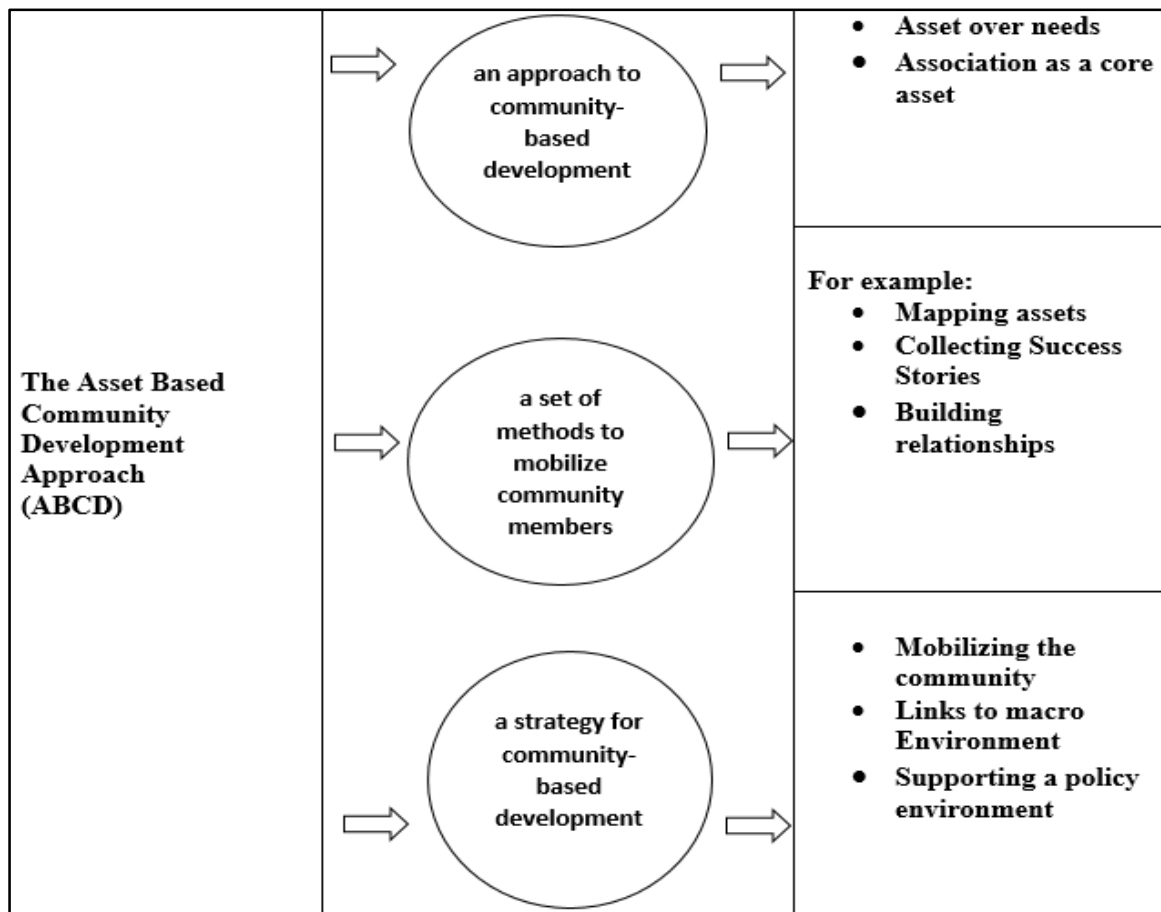
A flight of stairs to asset based community development

Counteracting the predominant needs based approach to development in the USA, John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann at the Institute for Policy Research (IPR) at Northwestern University articulated for the first time that ABCD is a way to successful community building (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). As an approach to community-based development, ABCD rests on the principle that a recognition of strengths and assets is more likely to inspire positive action for change in a community than is for example, an exclusive focus on needs and problems. At its core are associations of community members, both formal and informal. As engines of community action, and as a source of power and leadership, these associations are considered to be important assets of and for a community (Greene, 2000).

Accompanying this approach is a set of methods that have been used to mobilise community members around a common vision or plan. While there is no official blueprint, these methods could typically include:

- collecting stories of community successes and analysing the reasons for success;
- mapping community assets;
- forming a core steering group;
- building relationships among local assets for mutually beneficial problem solving within the community;
- convening a representative planning group;
- leveraging activities, resources, and investments from outside the community (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

Image 2: Conceptual Model of ABCD



Conceptualization of the ABCD approach by Mathie and Cunningham (2003). Adopted from Satovuori, 2003

In the initial phase of ABCD the approach to mobilizing communities through appreciative inquiry (AI) that promotes positive change (in organizations or communities) by focusing on peak experiences and successes in the past. The analysis through appreciative enquiry becomes the reference point for future community actions (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). As Elliott (1999) emphasises in the title of his book, conducting appreciative inquiry is all about *Locating the Energy*

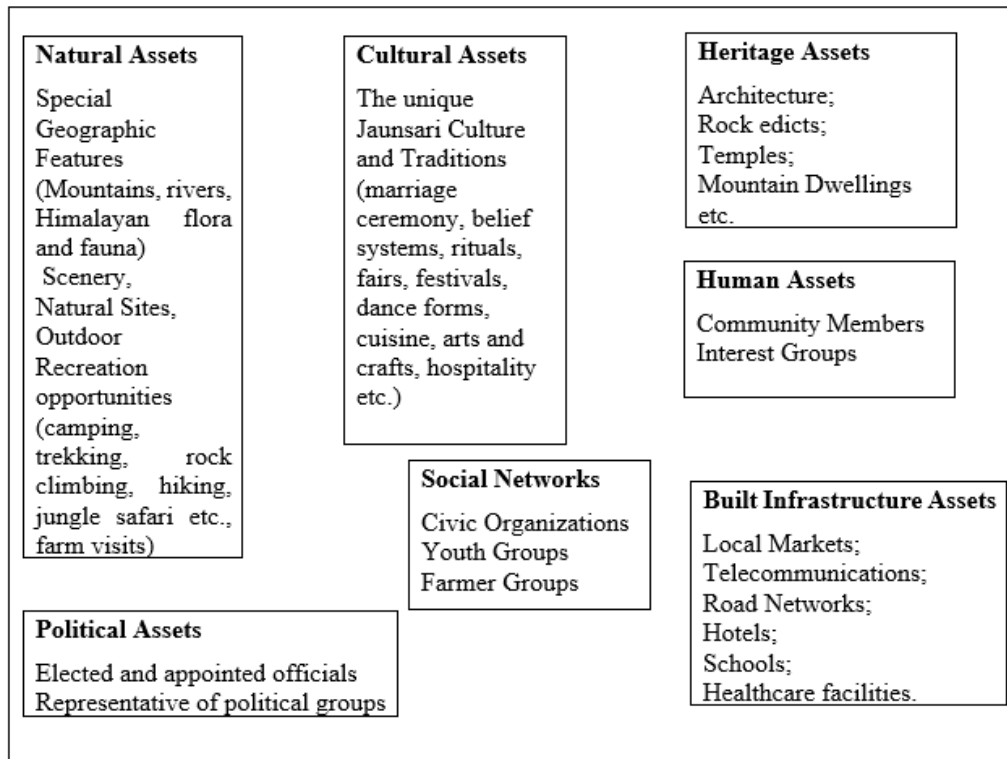
for Change. In the second step the asset based development need the practice of acknowledging, documenting, and mapping the assets (Ennis & West, 2010).

The formation of groups that can steer the ABCD approach is one further step and it may solve the community problems by building relationships amongst local assets. In the last phase of ABCD, the core planning group representatives must leverage the useful activities, resources, and investments from outside the community.

Integration of local assets with tourism for community development in Jaunsar-Bawar

The asset mapping of Jaunsar-Bawar reveals that the region, while having an abundance of wonderful assets in the form of pristine nature, rich culture, interesting heritage, a stable socio-political system and reasonable infrastructure, remains impoverished.

Image 3: Community Assets of Jaunsar-Bawar



Source: author's own

The Himalayas are amongst the major attractions of the world and have great potential for recreational opportunities that can create opportunities for the community members like tourism based entrepreneurship development, guiding and interpretation services for the visitors and other entrepreneurial ventures. The major nature based destinations in the region are Chakrata and its surroundings, Budher cave, Tiger falls, Koti-Kanasar and Deoban. The unique aboriginal culture of Jaunsar can entice different groups of travelers that often include historians, social anthropologists, cultural anthropologists, and general culture lovers to their community. If it can be rightly promoted, it can revive the dying cultures and traditions in the region by giving it a new lease of life to them .



The region is famous for its wide range of heritage in the surroundings of Kalsi, Hanol, Chakrata, Deoban, Mendrath and Lakhamadal. These heritage areas have been attracting historians and religious tourists for many decades. Above all, the amalgamation of all these assets while keeping human, political, social and built infrastructure at the center, can greatly benefit the community members in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres of their lives. Above all, the participatory approach through ABCD can have the following impacts on the community in the long run:

- Revival and restoration of local natural, cultural and heritage assets
- Activation of useful social networks
- Enhanced built infrastructure
- Stimulation of political groups to contribute to activism for community development
- Building greater community capacity
- Empowering of the youth and women in particular
- Development of entrepreneurial skills and innovative businesses

Conclusion

The novel approach of Asset Based Community Development in the field of tourism has not been applied explicitly in the region of the study. The modern bottom-up approach of ABCD has the potential to cooperate with community based tourism development, if it can apply carefully crafted strategies. The Jaunsar-Bawar region of the state Uttarakhand is in the need of the right kind of developmental approaches. The Himalayan mountain dwellers in these communities are socially marginalized and developmentally underdeveloped and this is an unsatisfactory situation. ABCD faces frequent challenges. There must be an effort to avoid dependency on any external agencies facilitating the process. In addition, some environments may not be favorable to the ABCD process. It may thus be difficult to endorse in an antagonistic milieu or in settings in which social hierarchies downgrade the value of the people. Nonetheless, ABCD could gain from the methods produced by participatory development practices for community-based research, and from its analysis and development, and for especially executive capacity building. Asset Based Community Development when linked with the integration of effective tourism initiatives can lead to a cessation of the numerous long standing sorrows and hardships faced by these mountain dwellers. So, it is hoped that somewhere down the line, the government and/or donor agencies will incorporate the application of ABCD into their policies and approaches, so as to make Asset Based Community Development possible via tourism that is sustainable. While community assets are important, this is not to suggest that there is no need for outside resources. However, the locals must be mobilized and have a say in how the resources are effectively to be utilized. By carefully identifying and using the many capacities of locals in the communities the principles of ABCD will be effectively applied. Especially the people with lowest income or relegated status should be considered first and foremost.

References

- Assaad, R., & Rouchdy, M. (1999). *Poverty and poverty alleviation strategies in Egypt* (Vol. 22). Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press.
- Bankoff, G. (2001). Rendering the world unsafe: 'Vulnerability' as Western discourse. *Disasters*, 25(1): 19-25.



Booy, D., Sena, O. & Arusha, S. (2000). Capacity Building using the Appreciative Inquiry Approach: The experience of world vision Tanzania. Global Social Innovations. *Journal of the GEM Initiative* Vol. 3.

Boyd, C. P., Hayes, L., Wilson, R. L., & Bearsley-Smith, C. (2008). Harnessing the social capital of rural communities for youth mental health: An asset-based community development framework. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 16(4), 189-193.

Buckley, R. P. (1999). International capital flows, economic sovereignty and developing countries. *YB Int'l Fin. & Econ. L.*, 4, 17.

Elliott, C. (1999). *Locating the Energy for Change: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry*, Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable development.

Ennis, G. & D. West (2010). Exploring the Potential of Social Network Analysis in Asset-based Community Development Practice and Research. *Australian Social Work*, 63(4): 404- 417.

Fitton, M. (1996). Does our community want tourism? Examples from South Wales. In: M.F. Price (ed.) *People and Tourism in Fragile Environments*. Chichester: Wiley.

Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (2011). *Mountain Forests in a Changing World: Realising values, addressing challenges*. Retrieved from http://www.mountainpartnership.org/fileadmin/user_upload/mountain_partnership/docs/FAO_Mountain-Forests-in-a-Changing-World.pdf (Accessed 1st January 2017).

Foot, J., & Hopkins, T. (2010). *A glass half-full: How an asset approach can improve community health and well-being*. London: Local Government Improvement and Development Agency.

Fuimaono, R.S. (2012). *The Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach in action: An analysis of the work of two NGOs in Samoa* (M.Phil. Thesis). Retrieved from http://mro.massey.ac.nz/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10179/3427/02_whole.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (Accessed 1st January 2017)

Ginkel, H.J.A.V. (2004). Preface. In Price, F.M., Jansky, L. & Latsenia, A.A. (Ed.). *Key Issues for Mountain Areas*, New York: United Nations University Press, xi -xiv.

Goodwin, H., & Santilli, R. (2009). *Community-based tourism: A success, ICRT Occasional Paper No. 11*. Retrieved from <http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/press/press-harold-goodwin.pdf> (Accessed 2nd January 2017).

Green, G.P., & Haines, A. (2012). *Asset building and community development*. London: Sage Publications.

Greene, M. (2000). *The power of associations: not mapping but organizing*. Evanston, IL: ABCD Neighborhood Circle Initiative, ABCD Institute.

Gupta, S.K. & Rout, P. (2016). Participatory Tourism Entrepreneurship in Mountainous Himalaya: A Neoliberal Approach to Restructure Economy, Society and Ecology in Parikhat Manhas et al. (Ed.), *Sustainable Tourism Development: Building Competitive Advantage for Destinations*, New Delhi: Black Prints,87-100.

Hipwell, W. T. (2009). An asset-based approach to indigenous development in Taiwan. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 50(3), 289-306. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8373.2009.01402.x>



- Khadka, R. (2012). Switching Gears: From Needs to Assets Based Approach to Community Development in Nepal. *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development*, 3(11), 81-88.
- Kretzmann, J. & McKnight, J. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. Chicago, IL: ACTA.
- Mathie, A & Cunningham G (2002). *From Clients to Citizens: Asset-Based Community Development as a Strategy for Community-Driven Development, Occasional Paper*, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish.
- Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G (2003a). From clients to citizens: Asset-based community development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice*, 13 (5), 474-486.
- Nagi, S. Z. (2001). *Poverty in Egypt: Human Needs and Institutional Capacities*, University Press of America, Inc. Lexington Books.
- O'Leary, T., Burkett, I. & Braithwaite, K. (2006). *Asset based approaches to rural community development*. International Association for Community Development (IACD). Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust
- Peters, B. (Ed.). (2013). *Applying an Asset-Based Community-Driven Development approach in Ethiopia, 2003-2011: Final internal evaluation report*. Antigonish, Canada: Coady International Institute. Available from <http://coady.stfx.ca/tinroom/assets/file/ABCDEthiopiaFinalEvaluation.pdf>
- Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2005). Asset mapping. In C. B. Fisher & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of applied developmental science*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1, 119-122.
- Satovuori, A, (2016). *Applying asset-based community development approach to community-based tourism: The Case of Beni Na'im in Palestine* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/160822/anna_satovuori_thesis.pdf?sequence=3 (Accessed 1st January 2017)
- The Asset-Based Community Development Institute (2008). *About ABCD*. Retrieved 5 January 2017 from <http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/abcd/about/>
- Timothy, D. (2002). Tourism and community development issues. In R. Sharpley and D. Telfer (eds) *Tourism and Development: Concepts and Issues*. Clevedon: Channel View.
- United Nations Environment Programme (2002). *Mountain watch: Environmental change and sustainable development in mountains*. Retrieved from <http://www.ourplanet.com/wcmc/pdfs/mountains.pdf> (Accessed 1st January 2017)
- United Nations General Assembly. (2011). *Report of the Secretary-General 2011: Sustainable Mountain Development*. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/resources/res_pdfs/ga66/SG%20report_Sustainable%20Mountain%20Development.pdf (Accessed 2nd January 2017)
- United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2015). UNWTO Tourism Highlights. Retrieved from http://people.unica.it/carlamassidda/files/2012/04/UNWTO_Tourism-Highlight_2015.pdf (Accessed 1st January 2017)
- United Nations (2000). Millennium development goals report. Retrieved from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview.html> (Accessed 4th January 2017)
- Uvin, P. (2007). From the right to development to the rights-based approach: how 'human rights' entered development. *Development in practice*, 17(4-5), 597-606.



Vidal, A. C. (1997). Can Community Development Re-Invent Itself?: The Challenges of Strengthening Neighborhoods in the 21st Century. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 63(4), 429-438.

Wu, Mao-Ying & Pearce, P.L. (2014). Asset-based community development as applied to tourism in Tibet, *Tourism Geographies*, 16, (3).