

## SUMMARY

Community initiatives for neighbourhood improvement represent a possible response for under serviced populations in the South in the light of globalisation, shrinking public funds and increasing absolute poverty. However, out of the many urban initiatives only a few ones fully succeed and become a best practice reference. With the aim of analysing common factors that contribute to the success or failure of such community initiatives, some 40 experiences were analysed in depth in Havana. In particular, the following factors were found to have an impact in the Cuban case, and may have relevance in another social context too.

**Motivation for founding the initiative:** Basically it was found that the number of successful initiatives raising form the grass roots level was about equal to the successful initiatives that responded to some programme or encouragement by the government. Among the government-induced initiatives there was a divide between highly successful national campaigns, like the one for urban agriculture, and very local support by decentralised technical support office located inside the neighbourhood. Intermediary levels of government did not have a visible impact.

**Responsible leadership:** In 13 of the 20 most successful initiatives the role of a natural leader was decisive. This is no surprise, but, of course, there is always the question what happens when the leader disappears or loses interest. In fact, this happened in two of the less successful experiences, but did not appear as a factor more critical than others.

**Relationship with public institutions:** Government intervention may have both a very encouraging impact or may constitute a hindrance to barrio initiatives. Central government campaigns for specific types of initiatives were found of extremely helpful, as well as cooperation with the very lowest level of government in form of the *Concejos Populares* – which in a way are part of the local community. There were a number of cases where intermediate - municipal and provincial - government appeared to be of hindrance, in particular when insisting on formal prerequisites whose usefulness was not always evident to all involved parties.

**Mass Organizations:** This type of organization is a particularity of Cuba and was found relevant to the topic in the cases of the Revolutionary Defence Committees (CDR) the Women's Federation. They may at best be compared with trade unions in non-socialist countries. In most of the studies cases they assisted neighbourhood initiatives particularly in terms of very practical support, such as spreading information in the neighbourhood or mobilizing people – but the significance was never found

to be of central importance, except in one case where the CDR on formal grounds stopped the initiative.

**Intermediary organizations:** These are a common type of support to community groups in many countries and can be either non-governmental (NGO) or municipal. In Cuba they are called *Talleres de Transformación Integral del Barrio* and respond to the municipal government. In the majority of cases their input was found to be highly supportive to the advancement of the initiatives – particularly the weaker ones. In fact, many of them would not exist today without this support. But a number of the most successful initiatives do so quite well without the *Talleres*,

**Religion and culture:** Cultural connotations and afro-Cuban religion in particular proved to be a strong motivation in a large number of the initiatives – even if the visible interest of the group was different: creation of green areas, dance or health. This was maybe the most surprising outcome of the research, and it is difficult to assess the validity of this factor in other social contexts.

**Different sources of finance:** Three main sources of finance were compared: fund from abroad, municipal and self-financing. International sources of finance were the most powerful particularly for the realization of investments, but they did not prove to very effective in mobilizing the residents nor did they contribute to sustainability of the initiatives that collapsed after the completion of the 'project' without being replicated in the cases included in the study. Municipal finance was very useful and comparatively well invested in maintaining the *Talleres de Transformación*, but imply an administrative dependency (with occasional bureaucratic hassles) and elements of uncertainty as not all municipalities see a need to establish such units or even to guarantee the continuation of the existing ones.

Obviously even modest attempts in self-financing have proven to contribute to the independence and stability of the initiative over many years, but the opportunities for this approach also depend on external factors, like the location of the neighbourhood in the city.

In conclusion it was found never one single factor determines success or failure of a neighbourhood initiative, but that more or less important factors can be identified and warnings formulated. By far the strongest factor was leadership in the analysed cases, followed by religious/cultural links, support from an intermediary organization and efforts in self-financing. No significant difference could be detected in respect to whether the initial impulse came from the grass roots level or from the government, and whether the key persons were men or women.