

The Future of Community Business

A Draft Vision for 2030



About this vision

A consortium of organisations – Co-operatives UK, Forum for the Future, Goldsmiths University, Locality, Plunkett Foundation, Power to Change and Social Enterprise UK, supported by independent expert Steve Wyler – has been working with community businesses (CBs) to define a positive, inspiring vision for the sector in 2030.

Since January, we have engaged more than 40 community businesses through workshops, interviews and an online survey. We have spoken to more than 20 other experts who are either active in the field, or have a perspective on external trends and changes impacting the sector – from government agencies and think tanks, to NGOs and regional or sectoral umbrella groups.

In June, the partners met to explore the insights gained, and begin working towards a vision. This draft vision is the first output from that work.

A work in progress

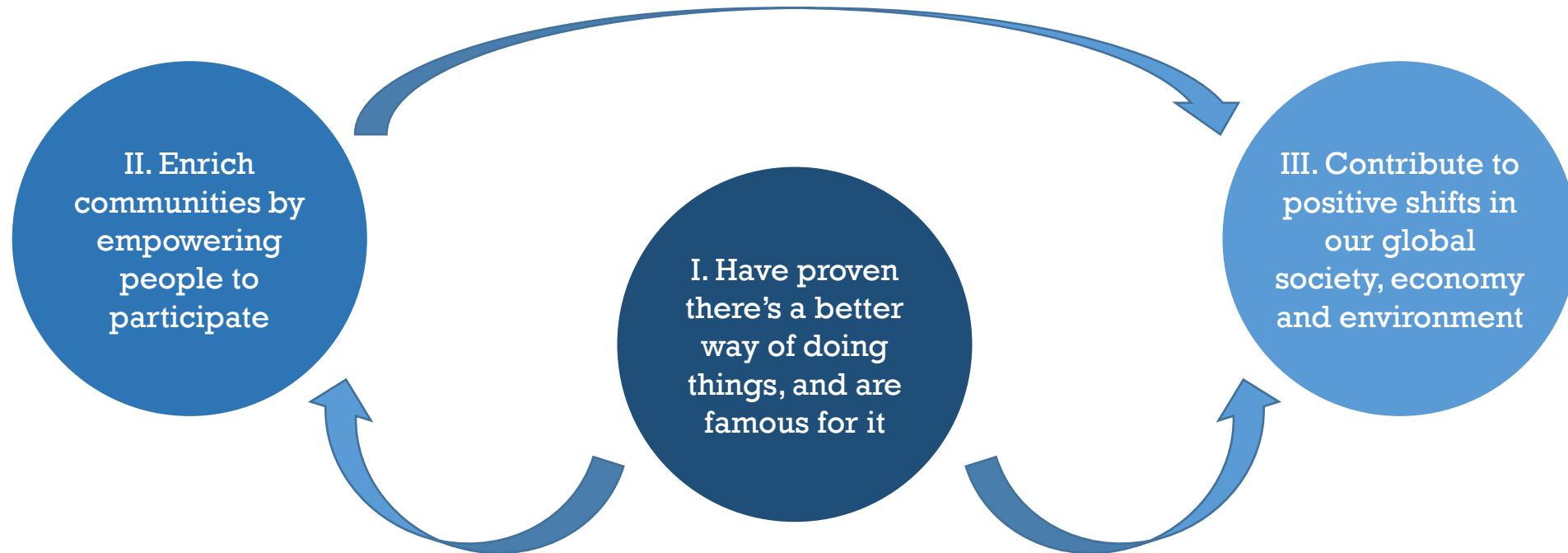
All good visions, like all good community businesses, adapt and evolve over time. We hope this vision will work as a starting point; if you and your community can take it and re-interpret it to suit your evolving context, we encourage you to do so.

When this vision states “Community businesses are...”, this may refer to most CBs, or some. We recognise that the sector is extremely diverse, with a multiplicity of aims, models and working methods. The vision is intended to capture, and amplify, the best in that diversity.


We'd love to hear your thoughts, to inform a second iteration of the vision in July. Please click [this link](#) to open the feedback form.

Three pillars of the vision

“In 2030, community businesses...”



“In 2030, community businesses...”



I. Have proven there's a better way of doing things, and are famous for it

1. **Are diverse and varied in nature, but with a distinct identity – a commercial vehicle for people to come together and make things happen.** In the context of a rapidly changing external landscape and economic volatility, community businesses are constantly listening, learning and adapting to respond to local needs. Pioneering creative solutions across many sectors, through a range of business models, they are rooted in distinctive values – agency and participation; self-help and solidarity; fairness and inclusion; ethics and transparency; caring and enjoyment. CBs are safe environments for radical experimentation, harnessing the power of enterprise to serve and strengthen communities.
2. **Are an established part of the UK economy – a successful model, important and trusted in communities.** Normal by number but unique in essence, community businesses are found all over the country, in both urban and rural settings. They share learning and co-operate for the common good – locally, nationally and internationally – and are supported by a sophisticated infrastructure of secondary-level institutions. Independent from state or corporate control, CB is a credible, mainstream model that is recognised and trusted by communities and other sectors. Success stories abound; every schoolchild knows how to get involved; and CB is a respected, aspired-to career path.

“In 2030, community businesses...”



II. Enrich
communities by
empowering
people to
participate

- 3. Are redefining meaningful work and contributing to successful local economies.** Community businesses are creating, retaining and distributing wealth locally. They harness latent talent and enable people to realise their potential by providing quality jobs and enhancing local skills. Through inclusive management and considerate working practices, they are good for employees’ health and wellbeing. At the same time, CBs enable greater local self-sufficiency and affordability in food, housing and more through co-ownership and co-production. In a world where work is more mobile, flexible and digital, CBs enable people to contribute to their local economy and be fairly rewarded for their work.
- 4. Are driving a renewal in the importance of place as a source of belonging, participation and power.** Community businesses are restoring a sense of place and identity to areas that have faced deprivation and exclusion, enhancing services and amenities with a local twist. By providing the vehicles, tools and processes for communities to coalesce around shared challenges and goals, they cultivate meaningful, face-to-face relationships. As engines of collaboration and social innovation, CBs build social inclusion and resilience. Through collective decision-making and increasing visibility of local issues, CBs allow communities to decide their own direction – rebuilding democratic participation and accountability.

“In 2030, community businesses...”



III. Contribute to positive shifts in our global society, economy and environment

5. **Are creating ‘tipping points’ in the sustainable transformation of sectors/systems.** Community businesses have disrupted sectors that have been too slow to adapt to society’s shifting needs and expectations. Harnessing innovation, they have created new systems that are decentralised, inclusive and sustainable (e.g. community energy). CBs protect common natural and cultural resources by keeping them in community hands, and as technologies like blockchain and AI become more widely adopted, they have democratised data access and ownership (e.g. through platform co-operatives). CBs connect the world through social action – they are vehicles for people to create global impact, locally. .
6. **Are enabling ‘natural growth’ – an economic alternative to widespread financialisation and profit maximisation.** Providing a powerful alternative to traditional corporate structures, community businesses scale up where necessary and appropriate, but also recognise that ‘small is beautiful’. Representing a shift from (detached) investor-led to (embedded) community-driven economic activity, they rebalance productivity with livelihoods, individual and community wellbeing, and reducing our ecological footprint. Since CBs are more concerned with viability than profit, they are delivering tailored services which other sectors would struggle to make viable (e.g. community transport). Through more widely distributed asset ownership, CBs have turned the social ‘safety net’ into a trampoline.

Assumptions and enablers

What will communities look like in 2030?

This is an important question if we are to envision a positive role for community business to play within those communities.

The vision makes certain assumptions about the state of communities and wider society in 2030, which in turn will depend on a series of enabling actions being committed to by a range of stakeholders, both inside and beyond the sector. These will be explored in more detail in the next phase of this project.

As examples, some of the enabling factors and actions that have been suggested so far include:

- Community businesses have done more to fully embrace ‘radical democracy’ in their practice.
- Like many businesses, CBs need financial and practical support to establish and grow. Support will be available when they need it, e.g. access to capital, even better local and national hubs.
- There has been sustained effort at the national/policy level to transfer assets into community ownership – this will be key to a healthy, independent sector.
- Society has become more caring and values-driven. The social economy is championed by leaders, and taught in schools and universities.

Please share your thoughts

To give your feedback on this draft vision, please [click here](#).

Please kindly provide your feedback by the end of Monday, 25 June 2018.

If you have any questions, please contact Simon Lee at s.lee@forumforthefuture.org.

