

**PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND PLACES**

## **Impact Evaluation of the Community Right to Buy**

The Community Right to Buy (CRtB) was introduced under Part 2 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 as a mechanism for encouraging opportunities for community ownership of land and land assets in rural Scotland. The CRtB gives community bodies representing rural communities with a population of less than 10,000 the right to register a community interest in land and to obtain first refusal on it when the landowner wishes to sell.

The Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos MORI, in collaboration with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), to evaluate the impact of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 on local communities in the period from 2004 to 2014. This document presents the main findings from the evaluation.

### **Main Findings**

- As of late November 2014, 206 community bodies had been approved by Ministers as a company limited by guarantee for the purposes of land acquisition.
- However, the number of community bodies completing a purchase was much lower. At the time of the evaluation, there had been 174 applications made by 94 community bodies to register an interest in land and 22 purchases of land or assets had been made.
- Around half of those registering did not have the opportunity to purchase land as it had not come up for sale. Among community bodies where the land had come up for sale, around half were successful in purchasing (either wholly or partially, and within or outwith the CRtB legislation).
- In general, the positive outcomes that were anticipated from the CRtB such as an increase in knowledge and skills, community cohesion, motivation to develop initiatives, and involvement in land decisions have been delivered but to varying extents and in relation to various stages of the process.
- The extent to which positive outcomes had been achieved in the case studies varied in relation to a number of factors, including community capacity, stage of the process reached, and (where land and assets had been acquired) the scale and income generating potential of the asset. A fuller range of outcomes such as income and employment development and greater influence on land assets was evident in cases where land and assets had been acquired.

## Methodology

The impact evaluation involved a mixed-method approach. The first stage consisted of a desk-based review of relevant documentation, interviews with stakeholders, and the development of a logic model.

An online survey was then carried out with community bodies involved at each stage of the CRtB process. Responses were received from 65 community bodies, from a sample of 186 (response rate of 37% after adjusting for 29 non-contacts). Following the survey, 16 case studies were selected for more in-depth, qualitative research. Case studies were selected to include a broad spectrum of communities involved at each stage of the process.

The impact evaluation has been structured using a logic model approach which shows the planned inputs and activities that are intended to lead to short, medium and, ultimately, long term outcomes. The logic model is shown on page 5 of this document.

## Examples of Outcomes

Each of the short term and medium term outcomes for communities identified in the CRtB logic model have been met to an extent.

Examples of positive outcomes that have been met include:

- Awareness of the CRtB had increased and members of community bodies felt motivated to participate in the process and in other initiatives on behalf of the community.
- Community bodies identified a range of skills that had been improved as a result of the CRtB process including legal knowledge (67% of survey respondents), knowledge about the community and its aims (61%), communication skills (57%) and organisational skills (51%).
- Case study participants felt that their involvement in the CRtB had helped them to feel a sense of empowerment. Among survey respondents, 57% respondents agreed that the CRtB had made people think that they can make a real change in their community.
- More than half agreed that the CRtB had stimulated ideas and debate on how the community could use local land and buildings differently (57%), while 54% agreed that the CRtB helped the community to understand the needs of the community and 53% agreed that the process helped deliver shared community objectives.
- Increased sense of pride was stated as a positive outcome by a small number of case studies and survey respondents, mainly those that had successfully purchased land or assets.
- Increased employment opportunities were evident but only in cases where the community had purchased the asset.

## Extent and Variance in Positive Outcomes

Positive outcomes were identified from early stages of the process, such as motivation to participate in the process and an increased sense of empowerment as a result of participation.

Positive outcomes were most apparent among members of community bodies and those that were directly involved in the CRtB process. The extent to which positive outcomes have been experienced by the wider community has been mixed.

Outcomes specifically related to land and land assets, such as increased community involvement in decisions about land use, were confined to those cases where a purchase had occurred.

In certain cases where assets had not been acquired, there was a decrease in levels of motivation as a result of attempted purchases being unsuccessful.

The scale of the asset does not necessarily dictate the range of outcomes delivered, with a wide range of outcomes occurring in cases where the asset concerned is small in scale and limited in terms of income generating potential.

In general, the outcomes identified concur with many of the wider outcomes of community asset acquisition identified in previous studies

## Factors enabling outcomes

Local context and concern about decline and/or potential improvement (of key assets or the community generally) have been critical inputs to the CRtB among case study examples. Common inputs (or “enablers”) that have played an important role in helping to achieve outcomes have emerged from the research:

- One of the earliest steps in the CRtB process, the formation of community bodies, has been key to providing a focal point for communities and giving communities a voice that they may not have otherwise had.
- In certain cases the presence of key individuals has been an important enabler to achieving outcomes. Individuals that have been particularly active in the community body have helped motivate others to participate in the process.
- Advice and guidance from support agencies have played an important role in the process. Advice from Scottish Government, in particular, has helped to develop knowledge and skills relating to the CRtB process.
- Where land/assets have been purchased, a willing seller has helped make the process easier and has helped make a successful purchase more likely. Where this is absent, the chance of a successful purchase is less likely. This can be demotivating for communities.

## Barriers to achieving outcomes

Acknowledging that communities will have faced their own specific challenges linked to their unique circumstances, a number of common barriers to achieving outcomes have been identified.

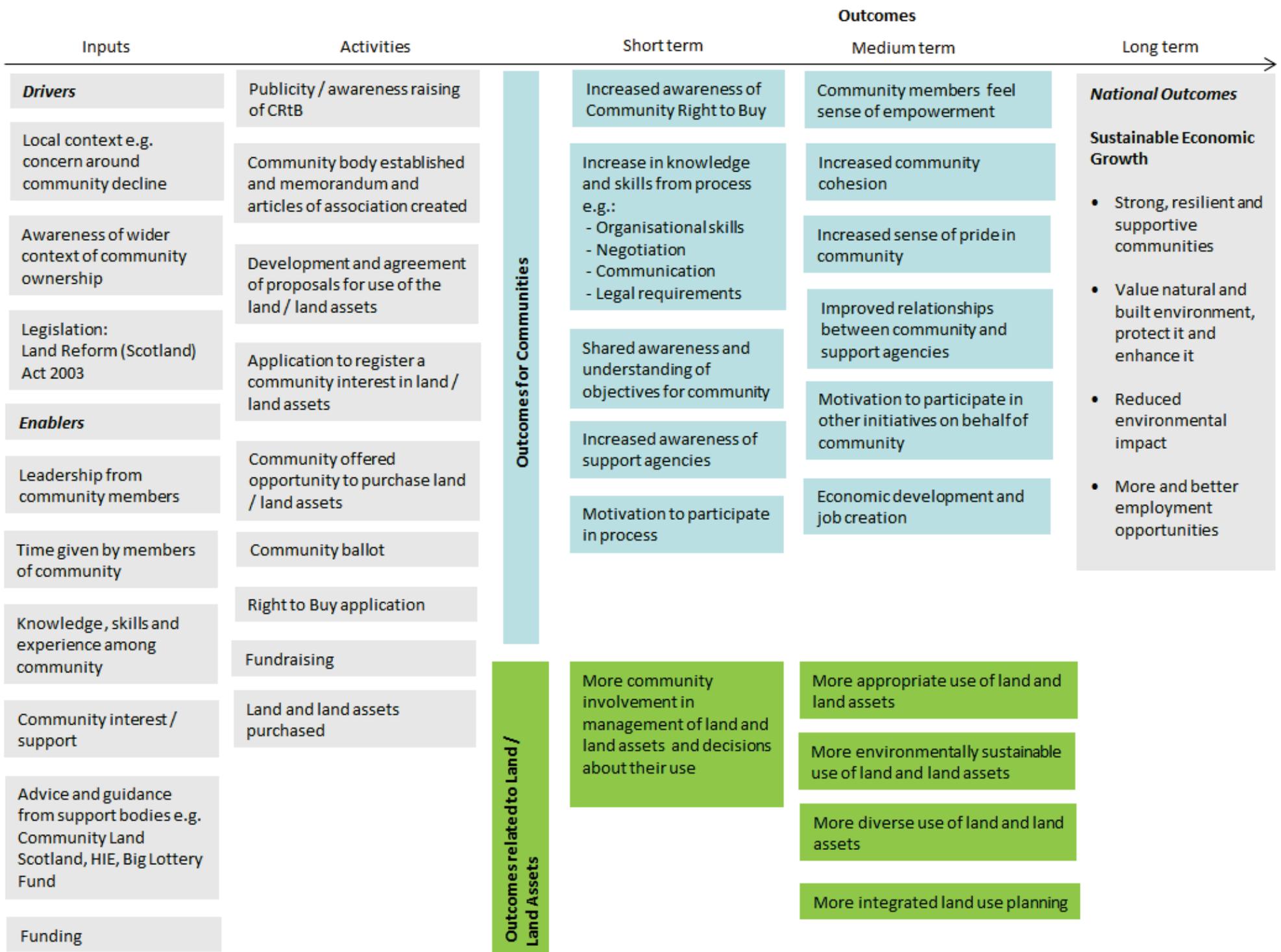
- In certain cases, it has been difficult for community bodies to sustain interest from the community over the long term. This has been a particular challenge in cases where a registration of a community interest in land has been active for a long period (e.g. 5 years) and re-registration of that interest is required.
- While the existence of community bodies has been identified as a key element in contributing to outcomes, in some areas an ageing and declining population has made it difficult to attract new members to the community body. This has made delivering activities and driving interest among the wider community a challenge for those involved.
- Lack of specialist knowledge and expertise has been identified as a hurdle for certain community bodies. The CRtB process has been described by community bodies as time consuming and arduous and the level of information required within the timescale available has presented a challenge.
- When attempting to purchase land or an asset, a key challenge faced by community bodies was securing funding to make the purchase at the valuation figure.
- Concerns about community-landowner relations can represent a further barrier and although examples of positive community-landowner relations existed, research results evidence landowner objections (and accessibility of landowners) as a key barrier to registering an interest through the CRtB.

Some of these barriers (e.g. timescales and costs/funding) are likely to be at least partly addressed through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. Concerns about community-landowner relations support the case for the development of a Community Land Agency (as recommended by the Land Reform Review Group), in part to act as an independent facilitator of negotiations between landowners and communities.

## Monitoring the CRtB in the future

Recommendations for monitoring the CRtB in the future include:

- 1) In order to measure scale of participation, it is recommended that the Scottish Government continues to collect and collate the existing administrative data from communities on an ongoing basis.
- 2) Data on the reasons for exiting the process at each stage should be collected from communities that have exited at particular stages to identify reasons why they have not progressed any further.
- 3) To help provide evidence of long term outcomes being achieved, it is recommended that the Scottish Government gathers further feedback from those that have made purchases on a periodic and ongoing basis.



### **How to access background or source data**

The data collected for this social research publication:

cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



© Crown copyright 2015

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/> or e-mail: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

This report is available on the Scottish Government Publications Website (<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/Recent>)

The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-78544-691-7 (web only)

Published by the Scottish Government, October 2015