

Case Study:

Developing Social, Economic and Environmental Indicators on Community-Owned Land



Summary

In 2024, the Coigach Community Development Company acquired 3,150 hectares of land at Badentarbat Estate, on the Coigach Peninsula in the North West Highlands. This project, sought to be the first step in establishing a baseline of social, economic, and environmental data at the start of this journey in large-scale community ownership. This project aimed to explore, with the community, potential approaches in measuring and assessing their progress towards achieving their agreed collective vision for the community. Meetings were held with community stakeholders and members to explore environmental, social and economic indicators.

Background

Established in 2010, Coigach Community Development Company (CCDC) is a community organisation representing the Coigach area with the vision that “Coigach will be a thriving community where the school roll is rising. We are building a more diverse, more sustainable economy.”

This project considered the social, economic, and environmental indicators the organisation may wish to prioritise and measure to map future progress. The project took as its starting point that community metrics are helpful tools, particularly for measuring progress, success, and how well an organisation is working towards its objectives. Measuring and tracking progress using indicators can also be an instrument for engaging people locally, and it allows places and communities to be in a stronger position in negotiations when there are known data sets, often in relation to funders or local authorities and their provisions. Furthermore, measuring progress can promote best practices and exemplary land management, support more transparent development, meet objectives, and demonstrate the delivery of public objectives.

How to measure community metrics is less clear, and this is what this project sought to engage the community with – to help in their thinking and to start to draft out metrics.

Project Overview

Project task:

The project sought to engage with the Coigach community through a workshop and online meetings to co-design and co-develop baseline monitoring criteria and methods, relevant to the local community in the future.

Staff from the Centre for Mountains Studies, UHI were engaged to bring academic and practical experience in social and biodiversity indicators and working with communities. Catriona Mallows and Mike Daniels from UHI worked with Laura Hamlet, chief executive of CCDC, and Rich Williams, a CCDC board member.

UHI staff discussed, drafted and talked through ideas with staff above and then in workshops with the [Coigach Community Development Company](#) and the wider [Coigach Assynt Living Landscape](#) initiative.

Project Overview

Project action and activities:

The research team engaged in regular meetings with CCDC to discuss social, economic and environmental indicators that may be useful to the community. A literature review was also conducted, investigating international, national, and local 'frameworks' and 'indicators' that measure entities including population health, community well-being and environmental integrity. Finally, a workshop was held in early July with CCDC and community members to sense-check this approach. An approximate total of 28 people attended. The workshop included a presentation from CCDC on their proposed Badentarbat Estate development plan, followed by the research team providing an overview of why metrics and indicators are of use, and some of the social, economic and environmental indicators that seem most appropriate to track in the area. The workshop concluded with a facilitated discussion to hear community views about the proposals for Badentarbat and how to measure success or progress using indicators.



Project Overview

Project outcomes and results:

This project represents a first step in establishing a baseline framework of social, economic and environmental indicators to support Coigach Community Development Company in its management of Badentarbat estate and wider work. Rather than providing a definitive set of measures, the project has identified a starting point that draws on existing international frameworks, national and regional policies, local priorities, and the aspirations of the Coigach community. By combining evidence from literature and engagement with CCDC, the proposed indicators offer an understanding of change across environmental, social and economic dimensions.

A key finding from this work is that meaningful measurement should reflect the specific context, ambitions and capacity of the community. While some indicators can be drawn from existing datasets, others will require local data collection through surveys, environmental monitoring and continued community engagement. Equally important is recognising that 'success' or 'progress' cannot be measured solely through quantitative indicators; qualitative evidence, local knowledge and community experience are essential in interpreting change and understanding whether development is delivering the outcomes that matter most to local people.

As plans for Badentarbat develop, the indicators proposed here should be viewed as an adaptive framework that can evolve alongside emerging priorities and opportunities. Establishing baselines, agreeing on the most appropriate scale to monitor progress, and defining monitoring timeframes could enable CCDC to demonstrate progress to the wider community and other stakeholders, inform community decision-making, and provide greater accountability to the community and its vision.