

An evaluation of Cydcoed: the social and economic benefits of using trees and woodlands for community development in Wales



Executive Summary for Forestry Commission Wales November 2008

Social & Economic Research Group
Environmental & Human Sciences Division

The Research Agency of the
Forestry Commission, Great Britain

1. Background

Wales is the only country in the UK with a legislative responsibility to incorporate sustainable development principles within every policy and strategy. All Assembly Government policy is focussed on creating a more prosperous, healthier and better educated country. Cydcoed, developed within the *Woodlands for Wales*¹ strategy, demonstrates integration and synergy with the Assembly's forward vision.

Cydcoed was funded through the EU Objective 1 programme and the Assembly Governments Pathways to Prosperity scheme. The programme was aimed at, but not exclusive to, two key areas: communities classified by the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation as being the most deprived and; communities where the population has no access to community greenspace for relaxation and exercise. Funded over two phases (2001-2004; 2003-2008), Cydcoed was a £16 million programme that gave 100% grants to 163 community groups across the Objective 1 (West Wales and the Valleys) region.

The core objectives of Cydcoed were to use community forestry to deliver social inclusion and to create social capital; to help create and maintain high capacity community groups able to influence decision about their locality; woods that provide long term social, economic and environmental benefits and; individuals able to play a positive role in their communities.

For Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) Cydcoed contributed across four major themes within *Woodlands for Wales*: woodlands for people; a new emphasis on woodland management; a diverse and healthy environment and; tourism, recreation and health. It is the social and economic contribution made to these themes that this evaluation presents.

1.1. Objectives of the evaluation

This evaluation was commissioned by Cydcoed and FCW. Joint funding was secured from Corporate Forestry Support (CFS) and from Cydcoed. We provide an independent evaluation of Cydcoed, analysing the extent to which it has achieved the long term desired outcomes of the programme, and the impact on the communities in which projects occurred. In addition an economic analysis examining the public benefits of Cydcoed is presented. Our results, whilst robust, have been restricted by the lack of baseline data, indicator development and ongoing monitoring within the programme.

1.2. Methods and indicators

The methods used for this evaluation were developed as a result of the existing structure of the Cydcoed programme, and the requirements of the external funding body (the Welsh European Funding Office). In order that both objective (qualitative) and subjective (experiential or qualitative) outcomes be captured, it was important to develop a suite of indicators prior to any research taking place. The researchers utilised interdisciplinary methods, focusing on surveys of each Cydcoed group; surveys of a representative sample of groups and woodland users; semi-structured interviews, focus and discussion groups; telephone interviews; qualitative case studies; an economic analysis of the non market public benefits of Cydcoed and; desk research and literature reviews.

¹ Forestry Commission Wales, 2001

2. Thematic Research

2.1. The Cydcoed Programme: development; positioning; structures; skills partnerships and processes

FCW utilised Cydcoed as a mechanism to encourage community interaction with trees and woodlands on and off the Assembly Estate. Whilst innovative for FCW, it fitted well with *Woodlands for Wales* and complemented other Assembly policy.

Cydcoed was delivered at arms length from FCW: first under the auspices of Tircoed² and subsequently under the umbrella of FCW, but as a separate, semi autonomous body. This resulted in confusion, both within and outwith FCW. A lack of internal communication about the ethos and remit of Cydcoed was compounded by Project Officers being home based: Officers often felt isolated and tensions arose in relationships between Cydcoed and other FCW staff. These relationships were fundamental in shaping the way Cydcoed worked- and delivered- within FCW. Issues were compounded by a lack of guidance and protocol for staff, who in some instances had not understood that Cydcoed was an internal programme.

The Cydcoed Officers had a wide geographic remit, yet the team structure was cohesive and functioned well. A more structured, phased, approach to the development and funding of projects could have lessened the pressure for Officers operating over a large spatial area. Project groups cited the Officers presence on a local area basis, and their ability to act as facilitators and advisors, as a key success factor of Cydcoed.

Officers were expected to have a diverse range of skills and to be flexible, adaptable and knowledgeable on a wide range of issues. In some instances this was felt to be onerous and Officers indicated that in some instances they did not feel confident in approaching FCW colleagues for help or advice. It is apparent there is a lack of consistency in attitudes to community involvement in woodland across the FCW Districts.

Cydcoed Officers were employed for their knowledge and expertise in the field of community development. This knowledge has proved crucial to the Cydcoed programme and the way it has evolved on the ground: engaging with both individuals and other organisations at a local and national level.

Partnerships at all levels have proved important to the majority of groups. Difficulties were cited where there was a perceived loss of control for the group, where partner bodies failed to deliver or took control of the project. Cydcoed did not establish partnerships *per se*, but acted as a facilitator for partnership formation. Many of these have remained sustainable and some have led to higher levels of community representation in local governance issues.

Partnership working accrues social capital for the people involved. The formalised status of the project groups (a prerequisite of funding) acted as an indicator of competence for potential partners.

Although limited by the finite nature of the programme and the associated funding, the strength of allowing groups to identify woodland projects and providing finance to

² www.tircoed.org.uk

achieve their goals has proved an empowering experience for the people involved, reflecting the diverse range of communities and needs across Wales.

2.2. Health and well being benefits

Over 90% of respondents to the survey felt the woods to be an important part of creating a sense of well being through offering a relaxing and stress free area: a half of those questioned indicated an improvement in their overall well being since being involved in a Cydcoed project.

A larger proportion of the younger age groups (<45 years) have benefited from a 'considerable improvement' in well being compared to the other groups. Over 90% of those questioned felt safe visiting the woodlands.

Just over a half of people involved in a Cydcoed project agreed that taking part had led them to take more regular exercise and over 40% stated their physical health had improved since becoming involved.

Analysis reveals that males, rather than females, benefit more from increased exercise, but that the 45-64 age group of both sexes report the least benefit accrued.

Both questionnaire and focus group work support the tenet that Cydcoed project woodlands help increase regular physical activity. This is most likely to be the case because of the woodlands proximity to residential areas (60% of respondents indicated they walked to the woodland) and because no expenditure is required in order to use the woods.

Insights from the case studies show that many groups are using the woodlands for 'walk your way to health' schemes in conjunction with Local Authorities and that the physical benefits of the woodland are widely recognised. Comments included:

It'll get people out more, walking or riding their bikes, it'll be nice out there
(Cydcoed group member, Glan Morfa)

2.3. Social and human capital benefits

Social capital takes time – often years – to accrue. It would be beneficial to revisit Cydcoed project communities in the future to examine the longer term effects of the intervention.

To date, approximately 18,000 school children have been involved to some degree in Cydcoed projects. Project groups have 8,955 members and work with a further 6,490 people from other community groups. Over half of those questioned agreed their level of trust in the community had increased as a result of taking part in a Cydcoed project and around 75% agreed that they knew more people as a result of Cydcoed.

Eighty five percent indicated that the quality of life for the community had improved by being involved in Cydcoed and 79% thought the projects had helped develop stronger ties between people in their community.

Almost half of those questioned indicated that Cydcoed had provided them with an opportunity to volunteer. This suggests a latent desire to be involved in community activities.

Over a third of respondents to the research claimed the project had reduced, or stopped, anti social behaviour in and around the woodlands and one third indicated the projects had provided a place for children to play.

Case study research shows that knowledge and skills developed through Cydcoed are now being cascaded through the community. Whilst it is difficult at this stage of Cydcoed to ascertain the true depth of increased social capital, there is little doubt that projects have increased trust, networks and relationships at the individual and community level.

2.4. Education and learning benefits

Whilst primary schools were able to use the projects to help meet some national curriculum objectives, secondary school involvement was, in the main, restricted to those exempt from curricular activities but involved in key skills work. The national curriculum was cited as a restricting influence on visits to the woods, but this was prior to the introduction of the new Foundation Phase of education for 3-11 year olds in Wales, where more emphasis is given to outdoors education.

Teachers reported that children were more confident and more relaxed when in the woodlands, but they were hesitant to agree that this was transferred to the classroom.

Twenty nine percent of those involved indicated that they had gained general work experience, but only a small increase in professional qualifications as a result of involvement was reported. This may be owing to the fact that many of those involved indicated that they were retired from employment.

Case study research shows that several projects have established student placement schemes with local colleges and universities. Other projects have developed apprenticeship schemes and open college accredited courses.

Over 3,000 people have attended courses organised by Cydcoed community groups, and over 7,000 people have attended events with an education and learning theme organised by Cydcoed groups.

Seventy eight percent of respondents agreed that being involved in the project had given them a better understanding of the local environment and over 83% agreed that visiting the woodlands helps people to learn about nature.

2.5. Recreational benefits

Our research shows that woodlands are receiving increased and new recreational use as a result of Cydcoed. This is the case even where there are existing public forestry sites, but at a greater distance from where people live. Cydcoed woodlands are situated close to centres of population and the majority of people access them on foot.

The most popular activities included walking, watching wildlife and birds and just enjoying the countryside. An average of 420 metres of new path, or track, was created by each Cydcoed project. A total of 326 new access points were created with another 326 improved and upgraded.

Seventy five percent of those questioned identified recreation as a benefit for their household and about half indicated that their recreational use of the woodland had increased since being involved in the Cydcoed project.

Case study research shows that informal play has increased in Cydcoed woodlands, and that many woods are now being used as 'shortcuts' to schools, shops and to visit friends.

2.6. Environmental benefits

An evaluation of the environmental contribution of projects to the environment was not an integral part of the research brief. It is recognised that environmental improvements are very site specific and measurement of these requires definitive and site specific measures. However, the research was able to capture several environmental outputs from projects and gathered qualitative evidence of improvements.

Cydcoed projects have created 80 new community woodlands, covering approximately 205 hectares. There are currently over 340 new sustainable woodland management plans in place, which cover some 8,915 hectares.

Survey results indicate that the majority of respondents have benefited from the woodland by learning about the environment and over 98% of respondents agree that woodlands are an important part of the community.

Qualitative research with groups elicited the following comments, amongst others, concerning the environmental impact of projects to their areas:

The environmental enhancement of a housing site, where there had previously been little or no planting (Tredegar Community Woods)

As a result of the project the site has been designated as a local nature reserve (Fairy Glen)

2.7. Employment and local economy benefits

Our survey to Cydcoed groups returned negligible information on the creation and safeguarding of jobs: only 5% of households reported as benefiting from full time work and 2% from part time employment. This data only applies to those involved in implementing projects, where a significant number (40%) indicated that they were 'retired'.

Projects report that over 60 jobs have been created in the wider community and over 280 posts safeguarded. It was not within the remit of this evaluation to ascertain the nature of these posts, or their sustainability over time.

Projects report having supported over 40 timber and woodland businesses. Project groups were not required to monitor the economic value of this support or its contribution to the sustainability of local businesses.

Case study research indicates that there are concerns amongst the groups about the long term sustainability of posts created once funding has ceased. Some groups have been adept at drawing down additional funding from other sources, ensuring some jobs will be maintained. Groups expressed concern over the grant dependency of employment created through programmes such as Cydcoed.

Groups cited anecdotal evidence of increased visitors to the woodlands, and suggested that this would benefit the local economy.

2.8. Summary of non market public benefits

In the analysis benefit estimates are presented at two scales: community and programme:

- '*Community*' refers to the average benefits per community where a Cydcoed project has been implemented
- '*Programme*' refers to total benefits arising from the 163 projects implemented in the Cydcoed programme throughout the Objective One area of Wales.

Not all benefits can be scaled-up from community to programme and some benefits only exist in communities where a specific type of activity takes place (e.g. a sculpture park). In these cases the limited application of the benefit has been taken into account when aggregating measures across all projects.

Table 1, below summarises the monetised non-market benefits from the Cydcoed programme. Benefits are a mix of annual cost avoided, annualised benefits to society and one off benefits to individuals relating to skills training and employment. Total benefits at the community scale are not calculated due to:

- variability in school use of woodlands within communities (may be primary only, secondary only, or both);
- variability of recreational benefits that might be on offer;
- variability in environmental benefits resulting from Cydcoed investments
- variability in the range of ecological benefits arising in each woodland.

The community and national level total benefit measures are dominated by recreational benefits. Health benefits (high estimate) and environmental benefits are both also significant. The greatest recreational benefits are for walking, due to the large numbers of person indicating they engage in this activity, and the proximity of many of the Cydcoed woodlands to residential neighbourhoods. At the national level recreational benefits for walking range widely from £0.67 million up to £10.8 million per year. The variability is based on assumptions about the numbers of persons in a community engaged in walking.

Benefits from improved health and well-being are conservative and based purely on expenditure averted from reductions in the number of cases of heart failure, and do not include measures of benefit to individuals from living longer, or being engaged in full-time employment for longer periods. Increases in physical exercise identified in the study will also have a positive impact on a number of illnesses, as well as on overall well-being and quality of life of individuals, none of which have been evaluated in this study.

Local economic impacts are also underestimated as the analysis has not incorporated the effects of the Cydcoed programme money on local communities.

It should be noted that, with the exception of the employment and skills benefits, the values presented are annual benefits, and this will continue for as long as the woodlands continue to be utilised in the same manner. Benefits are also based on the assumption that woodlands and woodland access will be maintained in the future at current levels. There are clearly on-going maintenance costs (e.g. fencing, maintenance of gates and pathways, managing vegetation) in order to provide the flow of benefits indicated in the tables here. Some benefits, such as health benefits also require continuation of physical activity levels into the future.

Summary of benefits from the Cydcoed Programme 2001 – 2008

	Community scale (£ per year)	Programme scale (£ per year)
Education (annual costs avoided)		
Primary	900	64,800
Secondary:		
National curriculum	765	25,245
Vocational/other	500	16,500
Special		800
Total annual costs avoided		107,345
Recreation (annual benefits)		
<u>Walking</u>		
High	84,843	10,350,846
Medium	44,667	5,449,374
Low	1,292	157,624
<u>Cycling</u>		
High	581	3,487
Low	290	1,743
Sculpture trails	334	2,687
Wildlife/bird watching	3,672	297,432
Informal play	2,645	214,245
Total annual benefits		
High		10,867,725
Medium		5,962,766
Low		672,759
Healthcare (annual costs avoided)		
High estimate	£5,000	£815,000
Low estimate	£64	£10,000
Environment		
Landscape	6,534	261,360
Carbon sequestration	na	na
Ecological improvements	12,234	599,466
Air quality improvements	na	na
Total annual benefits		860,826
Skills acquisition and work experience		
(Note: these are <u>total</u> benefits over the programme period 2001-2008)		
Acquisition of new skills		
High estimate	5,350	875,000
Low estimate	1,000	163,000
Work experience		
Full-time work	10,400	1,695,200
Part-time work	1,000	81,000
Total benefits		
High estimate	18,150	2,879,400
Low estimate	13,800	2,167,400

Table 1: Summary of non market public benefits

2.9. Discussion

Whilst further research would be needed to assess the community benefits of Cydcoed in the longer term, the contribution Cydcoed projects have made towards the Assembly Governments strategic agenda has been considerable.

The main group of beneficiaries have been those directly involved in the projects, whilst the more diffuse include professionals and other organisations. The key successes of Cydcoed have been improved social cohesion and social capital. Less significance can be given to environmental and economic benefits. Environmental improvements have been very site specific. Similarly economic development has generally been low key, with some exceptions.

Cydcoed contribution to community development across Wales has been extensive. It has been successful in addressing local people, in building connections between individuals, communities and organisations and focusing on localised environmental issues. The aims of projects have been important but it is the process that is significant in terms of building confidence and capacity within the groups.

The concentration on forests, trees and woods has been valuable, as they have provided a focus for projects. Qualitative research suggests that this acted as a catalyst for involvement: many individuals stated that they would not have been so keen to become involved in community action had projects not taken place in and around trees, woods and forests. This is important as, although there are many other organisations in Wales offering community development expertise, the use of woodland as a mechanism through which to offer such opportunities is unique, in Wales, to FCW.

2.10. Recommendations

1. This evaluation was asked to determine the social outcomes of the Cydcoed programme and this has been provided based on the data available. We recommend:
 - a. Appropriate indicators be defined at the time of programme development
 - b. Appropriate baseline data is collated either prior to or as projects commence
 - c. A programme of ongoing monitoring is established and adhered to during the project/programme
2. The role of the Project Officers was cited as key to the success of the majority of projects. As demonstrated by Cydcoed, working with communities required a specific, and wide ranging, skill set. Future work with communities, on or off the Assembly estate, may require considerable investment in developing staff skills.
3. The type of support offered by Cydcoed has been valued by communities and has contributed towards multiple WAG policy objectives. We suggest that any future intervention is delivered on a pan-Wales basis but with particular emphasis placed on highly deprived rural and urban areas.
4. We would suggest that it would be beneficial for FCW to consider closer collaboration with other organisations in order to maximise the delivery of public benefit and value for money. This approach is particularly suited to spatially targeted delivery and would provide additional opportunity to

demonstrate the adaptability of woodland in meeting multiple, cross cutting objectives