Further to my consultation response submitted on 21st January 2015, I would like to present the following evidence for consideration by the Committee on the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, Part 5, “Right to buy land to further sustainable development”.

Sustainable development is often a contested and confusing concept, as the term has been used to justify developments that are not necessarily in line with the ethos of the original Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (United Nations, 1992). In any legislation the term “sustainable development” should be clearly defined, incorporating social development, ethical and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, environmental enhancement and protection, both today and in the future. The WCED (1987) definition of sustainable development provides a basis for intra- and inter-generational equity and the principles (namely 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 15, 16, 20, 21 and 22) of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (United Nations, 1992) provide further clarity on the obligations for realising sustainable development.

There is evidence from studies of communities, which have succeeded in community buy-outs, that securing land ownership makes a significant difference in the community’s sustainability. For example, community ownership has enabled the Isle of Gigha to develop sustainably and the population to rise. Previously, the housing stock was in an exceptionally poor state. Ownership has permitted regeneration of the housing, as well as other opportunities such as the development of renewable energy. The latter is important as it provides both energy and income. Community ownership has also given the people of Gigha the ability to determine their own future and this has been central to the community’s ability to develop sustainably (Didham, 2007).

Lack of community ownership and inability to secure land for necessary community developments have impeded the ability for communities to develop sustainably. Without land being available a community cannot progress infrastructure developments, unless a benevolent landowner is prepared to make available or sell the land to the community. Examples of community-identified projects are new affordable housing, life-time housing with integrated care, industrial units, business centres and renewable energy developments (Winther, 2014, Winther et al., 2015). These developments are only possible if appropriate land is available for development, but in all the communities which I have studied there is a lack of community-owned land for community development enterprises. Making land available is necessary for community sustainable development.

Many rural communities in Scotland are experiencing decline. Communities in Scotland are heavily disadvantaged in their access to and control of land (Wightman, 2011) and this injustice needs to be addressed. The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, Part 5, giving the community the right to buy land makes a significant step towards removing one of the barriers that prevent community sustainable development.
References


