

Ten Big Questions about the Big Society and ten ways to make the best of it

an easier to read version of
a paper written by New
Economics Foundation





The New Economics Foundation (nef) is an organisation that shares new ideas from all over the world that can help make communities and how society works better.



They wrote a paper about the Big Society. We wrote this version because we want to help people with learning disabilities get involved in the idea of the Big Society.



Inclusion North thinks that people with learning disabilities are already part of making good things happen in their communities and should be part of making Big Society ideas happen.

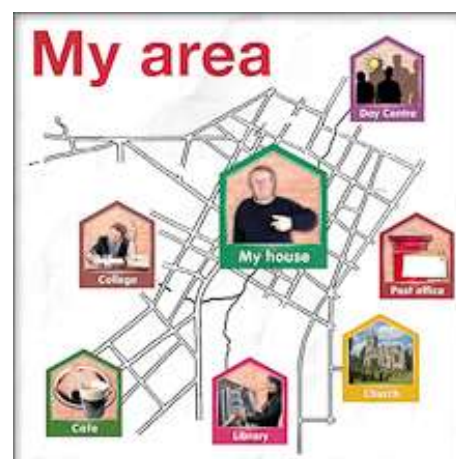
In this paper you will see three words a lot!

society



Society is about people together. We talk about society to mean all the different people in this country and how we live and work together.

community



Community is where you live and the things that you are and feel a part of, like church, your local pub or your speaking up group.

economy



The economy is about banks and about money. It is about how we buy and sell things. It is about we make, spend and save money.

What this paper is about



This paper is about an idea called **'Big Society'**



The Prime Minister is David Cameron. He and the government want everyone to work together now to make a 'Big Society'. They want everyone in the country and all the different parts of government to work together to make this idea happen.

David Cameron talks about how everyone has an equal responsibility for making things better. He says....



We're all in this together!

1. What is the idea of Big Society?



The idea of Big Society is to make things better in Britain by:



- Everyone working together



- Local people having more say about what happens in their area. The government wants local people to have more power and responsibility.



The government think it is better that local people and groups take more control – not the government or people in power saying what should happen. This means groups, companies, charities and families having more choice in their area about the way things happen.

2. What is good about the idea?



**I know what's
right for me!**

People have told organisations like new economics foundation that it is better when people can do what is right for them and not be told what is right by somebody else. Lots of people have the skills to solve their own problems.



We know that if people feel in control and part of what is being done in their area they feel happier and their health is better. We also know that really good things can happen when people work together in their community.



Working together means

- ✓ People get to know each other
- ✓ People share their ideas and skills so more good things happen
- ✓ People learn from each other

3. What are the problems the Big Society idea wants to fix?

The Big Society idea is about mending 2 big problems:



- **Help mend 'our broken society'**

The government thinks that in some areas there are big problems because lots of people are poor or do not work. They think that if local people have more power and control this will help them do things that make their community better.



- **Help the government spend less**

The government says the country does not have enough money to pay for all the services it used to pay for in the past. If local people and groups get more involved and do some things for themselves it will mean that Councils and the government can spend money better.

4. Will everyone be able to do this?



It is really good to remember that **everyone** has things they can do or ways they can help make things better for themselves.



BUTnot everyone has the same chances to learn lots of skills or share what they are good at.

This can be because of

- the chances they have had before – like where they grew up
- where they went to school or if they went to college
- how much money they have
- how confident they are



Different people and parts of the country have had more money or chances than others – this means people will not have the same chances to be part of making things happen in the Big Society. Some people will find it easier to be part of it than others.



David Cameron has said that **everyone** should be included in the Big Society.

5. Can everyone join in?



Groups of people work or meet together already - usually this is because they have something in common with each other. Most groups can choose who joins them.



People often get left out. Some groups have a lot more chances to get what they want than others. This is because money and power are not shared equally between people. Some people find it hard to join a group that is powerful, or have their say.



David Cameron has said he wants everyone to be involved in Big Society but the government's plans do not say how it will be more equal so that everyone can get involved.



If it is not made more equal some groups of people could be left out and not get their say.

6. Do people have enough time?



To make this idea of Big Society happen people will have to have enough time to get involved.

Some people do not have a lot of spare time to get involved in things in their area.

These people might be:

- Parents who look after their children on their own
- Carers who look after someone else
- People who have to work long hours to earn enough money



jobcentreplus

Even people who do not have a job might not be able to get involved because of the benefit rules on doing voluntary work.

For Big Society to happen we will need to find ways to make it easier for people to have enough time to volunteer in their area.

7. Can people working together make their community better?



Some people have been able to work together to make their community better. It is hard for people to do this and most communities have not been able to do it.



There are lots of reasons why this is hard but some of the reasons are a lack of money and being treated differently because of where you live or who you are.



Some groups of people do not get the same chances for education or jobs because they are disabled or poor, or from a Black Minority Ethnic Community. If this does not change these people will find it much harder to be part of the Big Society and make their community better.



One way to make this fairer would be to change how the systems work so that rich and poor people have the same chances and work together.

8. If the government does less will local people do more?



The government is elected by people in this country – this system is a good way to make sure that the people who live here have their say on what should happen. We need the government to work in a way that is fair and helps everyone be a citizen.



If the government gives good information and help to everyone then local people can get together to make their community better. Local companies or groups can help make communities better.



The government should still make sure that everyone has enough help with basic things like keeping healthy, getting educated, having somewhere live and enough money to eat.



9. What is the biggest problem with the idea?



The Big Society idea is based on helping local people get stronger and have more control.



It does not say how the country will be made fairer so that everyone can get involved.



When a society is fair it is better for everyone because there is less crime and more people are healthy and happy so they do not need so much help.

It will be easier to make the Big Society idea happen if money and power are shared out more equally.

10. What could make the Big Society idea work?

There is no easy answer to this question.

Lots of people are thinking about it now and you could get involved in that in your area.

Here are some of the ideas new economics foundation has to make it work. What do you think?



1. Make a fair and equal society the BIG GOAL

This is about thinking big and having a clear plan to make society more equal and fair for everyone. This means that EVERYONE can take part in their communities, have enough money and support to live their life and that we ALL treat the environment well so that things are good for our children and our children's children



2. Make how the economy works fairer for everyone

This is about local people having more control about how banks and the economy work. People who do not have lots of money should be able to borrow money to help make life better in the same way as people with lots of money can.



3. Make it easier for everyone to get involved in how big decisions are made nationally and locally

This is about local people feeling and being powerful in how local and national decisions are made. This means making sure things are fair for EVERYONE as well as making sure people can help themselves.



4. Make sure everyone can join in and take part

This means helping people who might not usually get involved, get new skills and confidence so they can get involved and they want to get involved. It is about individual people and about local community and voluntary groups.



5. Sharing ideas and power – always working with local people to get things done

This is about local communities and paid people REALLY working together to make things happen.

It means that EVERYONE gets to use the things they are good at and EVERYONE has a role – not just the people who have a paid job that says it is their role!



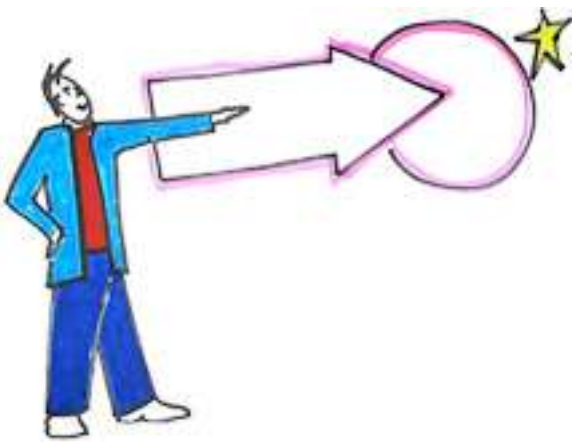
6. Professionals change how they work so that they help people rather than do things for them

This is about professional and people who provide services thinking very differently about how services should work. It means services stopping just doing things FOR people, and working towards helping people to help themselves and each other. It means seeing the support we get from professionals as only one bit of the jigsaw puzzle of help and support we all need in our lives.



7. Make it easier for people to work less hours so they can do more in their community

This means understanding that if local people and communities are going to help make things change, then they have to have the time to do it. If people work really long hours then it is hard for them to join in. This means that **EVERYONE** should do less paid work each week so that more people could have jobs and more people would have time to really join in



8. Make plans that work now and can keep working in the future

This is about making sure that all these big changes can keep going and are not just the 'big new idea' that will soon run out of steam. It means we have to have a big plan about how things can be better for a lot of years in the future. It means we have to do things that will stop problems getting bigger – like climate change or health problems



9. Find out from people what really matters to them in their community and check that is getting better.

This is about really thinking about how we will know that things are better and then making sure we check. It means checking more than just things you can count, like how much money people have. It means thinking carefully about things like whether people have friends and whether they feel happy and safe where they live



10. Make the idea of Big Society part of a big change to make everything fairer in this country, not just now but in the future too.

This is about remembering that this is a **REALLY BIG CHANGE** – not just changing a few things and hoping things will get better. It means knowing that things can't keep going on as they are now if we want things to be OK for our children and our children's children

'Ten Big Questions about the Big society and ten ways to make the best of it.' Written by Anna Coote at the new economics foundation, June 2010.
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