

# The Peaks and Valleys of Connection

## Smart Village initiatives and Rural Development programs in the Scottish Highlands and Uplands

### BRIEF SUMMARY

This research examines the experiences and challenges faced by communities creating Smart Village projects and development organizations working within the Scottish Highlands and Uplands. This report summarizes those experiences to help inform future rural development projects in the Highlands and Uplands, as well as other mountainous communities:

- ❑ The Highland's and Upland's geography provides several opportunities and challenges for rural development work, including long distances from other towns and cities, large administrative regions, and unique natural assets.
- ❑ Events such as the COVID-19 Pandemic and Brexit worsened communities' and development organizations' ability to continue community development projects, due to a lack of funding and conflicting commitments.
- ❑ Smart Villages in, and connected to, Scotland have created many benefits for communities, including community ownership of environmental data and better community management practices.
- ❑ Smart Village projects were most successful in areas where there was consistent funding, mass community involvement, and skilled volunteers.
- ❑ As the Scottish Government is working on a Smart Village policy, many community volunteers and organizations are confused on what a Smart Village but are eager to use the innovative technology and strategies to aid community development

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ Experiment and develop community planning strategies that are led by community members and volunteer organizations, supported by local and regional professionals.
- ❑ Create consistent, long-term funding programs to support rural development projects. Use existing organizations to distribute funding and encourage communities to build community-owned income generating assets.
- ❑ Increase trust between policy makers and mountainous communities by creating more place specific professional roles.
- ❑ Clearly define the Smart Village concept and develop holistic strategies that are easy for communities to understand and relatively simple to implement.
- ❑ Create online platforms that help communities share best practices, share resources, and encourage collaboration.

### Further Information

This research was led by Blake Glassford as part of his masters thesis. The full thesis can be accessed at <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/items/ab19151b-e656-4e0d-a6ac-e4cf0336cb7c>.

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