

# **Sustaining Vulnerable Communities**

**Presentation to  
Community Development Forum  
Waitakere City 20<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

# Outline

A VISION OF A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

THE NATURE OF VULNERABILITY

- **Social exclusion**
- **Social capital and power**
- **Social hazards**

HOPEFUL PRAGMATISM

- **Dealing with power**
- **Working with what we have**
- **Hopefulness**

# A vision of sustainable community



# The discourse of social exclusion

## PERSPECTIVE

## CAUSE OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

## SOLUTION

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### **Redistributionist**

Poverty and lack of resources to fulfil cultural obligations and social role within the community

Tax funded redistributive policies and programmes around adequate income support.  
Free access to good quality education and healthcare and open access to social housing in times of need

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### **Social integrationist**

Unemployment, loss of social networks and lack of appropriate role models

Employment focused training, free child care and sanctions applied to benefit entitlement

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### **Moral underclass**

Lack of moral character has led to welfare dependency, criminality and promiscuity

Limiting access to benefit entitlement and focusing on behaviours of criminal young men and single mothers

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# An outline of social capital

## THREE TYPES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

TYPE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL	TYPE OF PARTICIPATION	CONTRIBUTES TO...	ROLE IN CIVIL SOCIETY
<b>BONDING</b> Ties among people who are similar to each other eg age, gender, ethnicity	HORIZONTAL	Social support especially in times of need	Sharing common purposes and interests
<b>BRIDGING</b> Ties among people who are different from one another	HORIZONTAL	Social cohesion Democratic dialogue Civic identity	Dialogue between different interests & views in the public sphere
<b>LINKING</b> Ties with those in authority	VERTICAL	Democratic life Institutional legitimacy Responsive public services	Access to institutions and decision making processes

# Alternative versions of social capital

## PIERRE BOURDIEU

Various alternative types of capital.....

- **Cultural capital**
- **Social capital**
- **Symbolic capital**

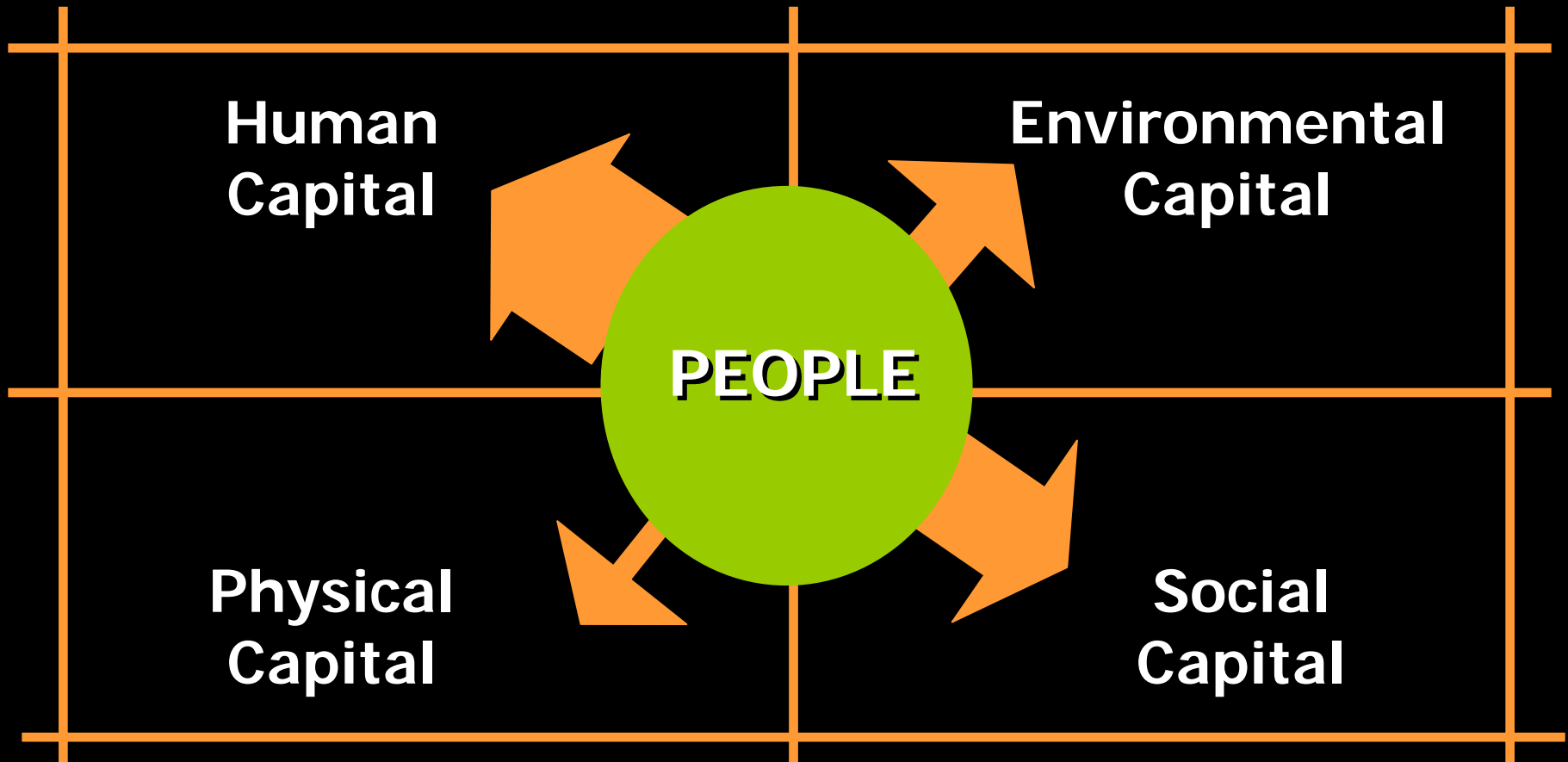
Capital = an economic concept

How we gain access to capital is a social process

Social capital is only a meaningful concept if it assists us to gain access to economic resources

# Sustainability and capital

## CONTRIBUTORS TO SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES



# Remember Cyclone Katrina?



[www.streetgangs.com](http://www.streetgangs.com)

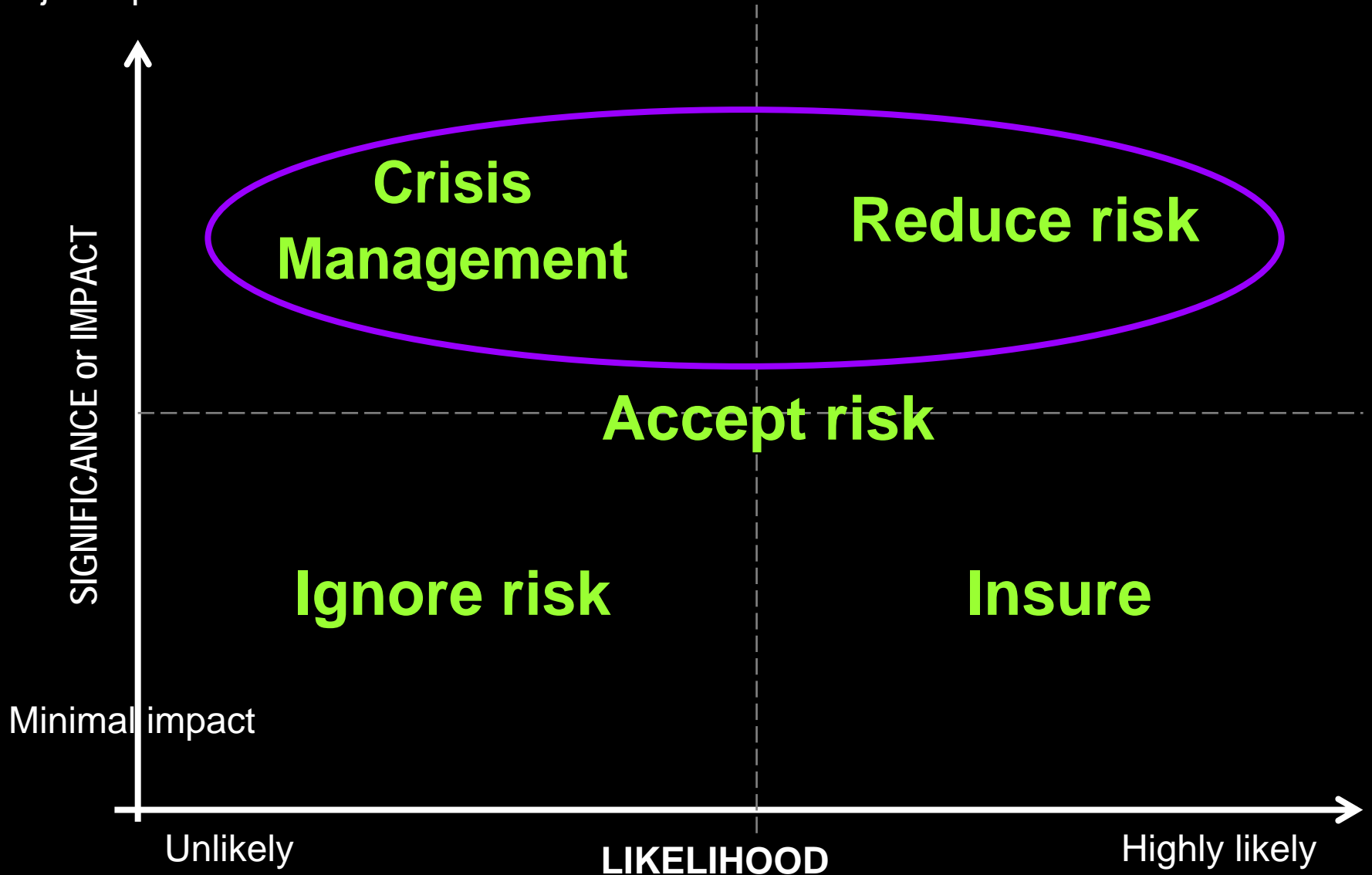
Photo by: Alex Alonso

- *Who faced the biggest risk and who suffered most?*

- The poor most often face the greatest risk
- **BECAUSE.....**
  - *They don't have choice about where they live and what happens in their neighbourhood*
  - *The risks they face are ignored or trivialised*
  - *They aren't told about the risks they face*
  - *The consequences of the risk are blamed on them rather than the circumstances*

# How do we respond to risk?

Major impact



SIGNIFICANCE or IMPACT

Minimal impact

Unlikely

LIKELIHOOD

Highly likely

**Crisis  
Management**

**Reduce risk**

**Accept risk**

**Ignore risk**

**Insure**

# Defining social hazard

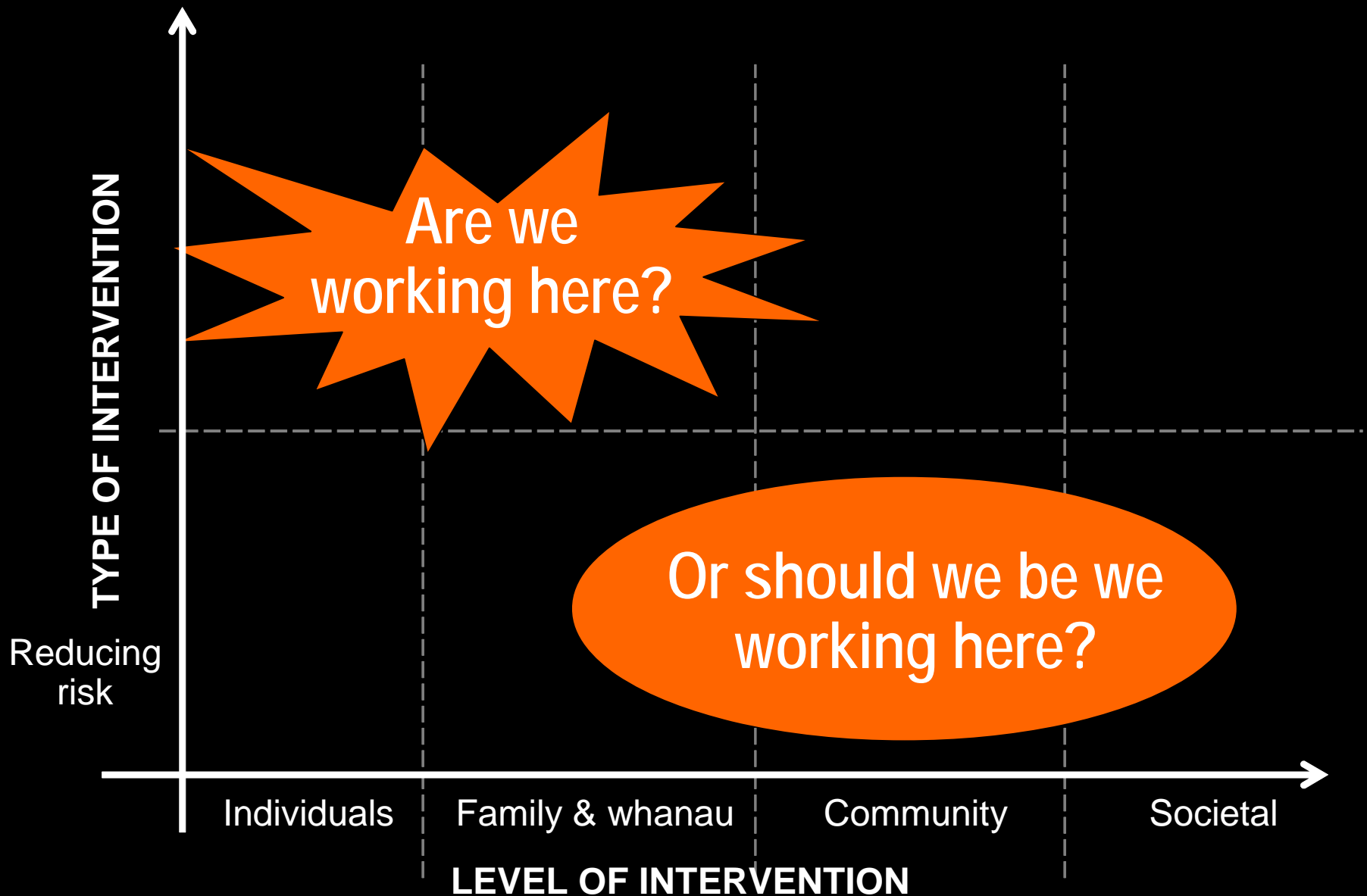
*Social hazard is risk from social harm caused by neglectful or malevolent social policy*

- GAMBLING LAWS
- LIQUOR LAWS
- INDIFFERENT POLICING
- UNDER-RESOURCED SCHOOLS
- CREDIT LAWS & LOAN SHARKING
- EMPLOYMENT LAWS & "FLEXIBLE LABOUR MARKETS"

# What risk is acceptable?



# Reducing risk or managing crises?



# Dealing with power

**No discussion of community development practice is complete without mentioning power**

*But have we hedged the power question in personal terms and allowed a discourse around power to distract us?*

# Dealing with power

Most of us work for organisations that wield power. This means that we are relatively powerful in most community settings

Power is not evenly distributed even in vulnerable communities and often “community leaders” are those with the best linking social capital to agencies of the State.

*We may end up appropriating the power of “community leaders” in the name of engagement but which is often little more than incorporation*

# Dealing with power

**BUT WE KNOW THIS ALREADY DON'T WE**

*Does our squirmishness about power and perhaps even a belief that the way to power is as important as the power itself limit our ability to use power more usefully and more equitably?*

Perhaps we should see ourselves as power brokers appropriating power from those with too much and redistributing to those with too little

..... CONTINUOUSLY

# Working with what we have

## THREE SIMPLE RULES

1

Relocate - go to where the people are and work with them on their terms even if this is not directly the cause.

?

Where or how are the most vulnerable people in your community already engaged?

# Working with what we have

## THREE SIMPLE RULES

2

Recreate – make it fun and practice simple everyday customs – even if it is not the cause.

?

What gets people together?

# Working with what we have

## THREE SIMPLE RULES

3

Activate – make it easy to do good things no matter how small – even if it is not the cause.

?

What gets people going?

# Communities of Hope

Optimism is often in short supply in vulnerable communities.

Hopelessness leads to fatalism and a belief that the future is predetermined and beyond our influence

**Hopefulness is a belief in the essential goodness of people and in our collective ability to do good**