



COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORKER THE QUALITIES REQUIRED FOR SOCIAL WORKER IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT :

This study addresses community participation as an important part of community development. It describes the conceptual basis of this connection and shows that the involvement of individuals with leadership qualities is essential to promote participatory development. In such instances the paper argues that a professionally qualified social worker with extensive field experience has a role to play. Unlike the local leader, the professional social worker, trained to provide selfless services, will make the most strategic interventions to motivate individuals' participation in participatory development. As examples, the study uses two community work projects to clearly identify and highlight examples in which professional social workers effectively revitalize communities for development through community participation.



KEY WORDS: *community participation, community development, professional social worker.*

INTRODUCTION:

Community participation is an integral part of community development. Awareness of the benefits of such measures must be created to encourage such participation. A community consisting of individuals with common homogenous characteristics defined on the basis of common concerns in terms of geographical features or lifestyle or common socio-cultural orientation can collectively organize their lives according to necessity by setting norms. Participation of certain community members becomes a pre-requisite for such movements.

In order to develop communities it is important to initiate a process whereby individuals, families and/or communities take responsibility for their own well-being and develop the capacity to contribute to their own development as well as to the development of communities. This study addresses community participation as an important part of community development because the participation of communities in development activities empowers communities which leads to the success of communities.

Community participation is the involvement of community members in matters that require collective decision-making. Participation in common activities can be defined as "an active process where intended beneficiaries influence program outcomes and achieve personal growth" (Oakley 1989). The range of opportunities for community participation, such as sharing information, voicing their needs and involving themselves in the development process of empowerment, is as wide and varied as the community itself.

To enable such participation some members of the community must have leadership qualities. Such leaders play an important role in facilitating and organizing such participation. In this context, it is pertinent to mention that there are communities that do not progress due to the absence and/or involvement of ineffective leaders. In such cases outside intervention is required for action. At this point professionally trained social workers can step in to initiate participation activities. In a sense, they step in as change agents. Change agents are expected to function purely as catalysts. Professionally qualified social workers are trained to take on such a role.

Community development is a multi-step process. It is based on the collective power of people to help themselves while helping society. Professional social workers play a vital role in this exercise by facilitating the initiation of self-help processes. Community development can also be referred to as rural development; A process said to help rural people to obtain better deals for themselves through collective action at the village level (Chandraratna, C, 2008).

According to Ife (1995:02), community development achieved through community participation is seen as "the process of establishing or re-establishing human community structures with new ways of relating, organizing social life and meeting human beings. Needs become possible... thus , community participation is an important process that helps members of the community to associate themselves with activities that promote their own development. Accordingly, community work carried out by professional social workers can be seen as an activity or effort by a community organization to facilitate the process of community development.

Community organization is used in social work as a technique to enhance the decision-making characteristics of an individual. Community organizing, taken as an activity at the community level, is an important method that facilitates the development of community-based services. A professional social worker is usually equipped to carry out such activities for the betterment of the community they serve. It is important to develop communities to initiate the process whereby individuals, families and/or communities take responsibility for their own well-being and develop the capacity to contribute to their own and community development.

Professional social workers are able to assess, advocate and intervene in community and environmental issues based on principles and the concept of wholeness. Trained professional social workers working with communities are typically trained to adopt multi-disciplinary intervention strategies that they have learned to cover the entire social continuum of community development, helping them to examine the broader cause/effects of socially-relevant community settings. Availability of resources to address issues related to cultural factors, family relationships, community involvement. By doing this they try to promote the development of the community which leads to the welfare of that community.

This study attempts to demonstrate the importance of community participation as a component of community development. It demonstrates the extent to which professional social workers use evidence-based knowledge gained from research and practice evaluation to improve people's lives.

METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to explore the extent to which social work interventions by trained social workers contribute to the development of communities through participatory processes. To fulfill the main objective of this study related to the importance of community participation for community development. A selected project report on community participation by two undergraduates reading for a bachelor's degree in social work at the National Institute of Social Development was used as the main source of data for this study. Two selected undergraduate reports in partial fulfillment of the Bachelor of Social Work degree were on the involvement of families with children in community development. The two social workers implementing the project undertook to address the key issues identified through the intervention strategies they had learned. The study therefore seeks to provide field based evidence to demonstrate the importance of community participation for community development and also to critique the intervention strategies adopted by social workers in the process to test the appropriateness of the measures chosen.

Data from the two case studies were obtained through a rapid participatory needs assessment, according to the authors. This enabled the undergraduates to identify problems and devise appropriate strategies to address them through appropriate interventions and while using project reports as data sources, researchers/undergraduates were also interviewed to obtain additional data using open-ended questionnaires.

The data and information provided in the reports were used for the study along with additional data available to them, in addition to interviewing the graduates using an open ended questionnaire. Unprocessed/raw data and other information and clarifications were obtained when necessary. Additional information obtained through interviews was mainly qualitative which was very useful and relevant for this study. Information was also obtained from relevant field and faculty supervisors about areas requiring clarification. An open discussion with student researchers and their supervisors on the role of professional social workers in community development through community engagement was very fruitful. The collected data were then processed to arrive at themes that were used in the subsequent presentation of findings.

Findings:

Profile of the selected communities

Two communities selected from two villages in two GN divisions of Northern Province. Villages were selected on the basis of caste. The total number of households selected was 112 and 262 respectively. The villagers were Hindus who were engaged in agriculture and related work. As these families settled in their own villages, they were initially happy. However, most of them (70%) faced severe financial challenges as they were prevented from rebuilding their livelihoods.

Identified needs

Student researchers initially identified the common needs of the communities through consultative group meetings with members of service provider groups from government, non-government and private organizations in these villages. A rapid participant needs assessment survey and focus group discussions were then conducted and observations were undertaken to collect relevant data. These data were processed and the results were analyzed. The results were then studied to list common needs. Identified needs were discussed in community meetings and prioritized by members of the communities.

During the discussion, the elders, who constitute a significant percentage of the population of the two villages, made several suggestions. His proposal was to utilize the untapped resource of the youth for developmental purposes as it would benefit the youth as well as others in the society. After discussions in this direction, families came up with the idea of forming small groups to work on this process.

The instructions included a general request to set up children's clubs and action committees to promote child welfare in villages. The main objective of the second suggestion was related to the enhancement of children's education encouraging children and their families to use the resources and opportunities identified by the children's club for their advancement. As per the recommendation Village Action Committees of Elders were formed to protect the child's development needs and help them solve their own problems at the community level.

Role of Small groups

Small groups were formed in the families to utilize the latent resources available in the grown up children for the development of the society. This step was the result of a survey at the preliminary stage when it was found that families and adult children have no idea of the concept of community development and the extent to which they can contribute to this development. The community appeared to flow aimlessly. They needed to realize their potential for the development of society.

This source has become a matter of concern for researchers. While devising a strategy in this regard, the investigators realized in subsequent consultative meetings with community members that

the community should first be made aware of their own shortcomings. When this was told to the community members, they suggested using the youth in activities related to community development and starting from the first school leavers. He said that this would definitely be beneficial to the communities as the potential of these youths is not being tapped in advance. It was recommended to form small groups of children representing both schooling and dropouts to begin this process.

Intervention by social workers

To facilitate this process, social workers realized that the community needed to be aware of the benefits of development. This has become an area of concern for researchers as the level of education among the villagers is low. Equipped with the arts and skills to organize communities for various needs (Miller et al, 2004). These student social workers initially organized public awareness programs on the importance of education for the development of society. He very clearly emphasized the fact that knowledge is power.

As a preparatory measure to convince villagers of the benefits of organizing for specific needs, social workers began conducting simultaneous home visits to informally discuss with family members the benefits of a participatory process for development. This informal *tete a tete* helped build trust among community members. As described by Rasanayagam and Amarasinghe (2000:40) in their study on social integration and poverty alleviation in Monaragala, informal relationships in Sri Lanka, rather than formal relationships, helped to foster the emergence of creative talents among the poor. As creative talent is useful and necessary for participatory development, this brainstorming exercise in informal gatherings conducted by researchers has contributed significantly to engaging young villagers with new suggestions for participatory development.

It also shows that professionally trained workers should focus on such methods and techniques so that the creative talents of the villagers can be developed for the development of the society. Exploitation and unequal relations should be eliminated. . The trust-building process through these informal gatherings enabled social workers to organize consultative meetings with the community to involve them in collective decision-making. This process enabled community members to assess the skills and resources available in their community to use for development. They were also apprised of the fact that such resources should be used strategically to initiate participatory development.

The importance of labor donation was emphasized on creating genuine enthusiasm and commitment for the development of the society. Details on power relations were discussed in order to understand their own strengths and weaknesses in dealing with their own struggles because positive thinking requires a focus on general needs rather than on individual needs. Consensus building is an extension of the mediation role that accounts for diversity of opinion in community meetings. This includes emphasizing shared goals, identifying common ground, and helping community members move toward a consensus position that is acceptable to all in the community. These common needs bring community members together to plan for their own common needs.

Social workers often facilitate the participation of community members in the process of recognizing the importance of the family's contribution. Student activists spent much of their time in small groups and action committees helping to achieve their goals. Social workers highlighted the importance of encouraging the participation of community members in the decision-making process.

Group facilitation is an important function in community work because many of the goals of group development can only be achieved through effective and smooth functioning of groups that allow group members to make mutual decisions and participate. This aspect is crucial to the participatory process that facilitates the community development process considered in this study.

Community activists used various techniques, strategies and specific roles such as social animation, mediated negotiation, group facilitation, resource linkage, organizing to facilitate the process of community development. Writing proposals and writing letters to service providers. The children's club was helped to build a playground for the community. The following changes were visibly facilitated by student social workers in the community.

- The importance given to children's opinions to help them make their own decisions
- Promotion of the "best interests of the child" policy (CRC, 1989).
- Children were given responsibilities in community activities
- Parents encouraged to have close relationships with children to build positive relationships
- Child friendly practices
- Development of the concept of punctuality in children
- Encouraging children's interaction with other children to reduce social distance between children and their families based on caste-based beliefs.
- Parents are re-enthusiastic about their children's responsibilities and club participation
- Improve children's participation in decision making at home and community level
- ,Motivating school dropouts to continue school education
- Parents/community members became aware of children at community level

"Community development is an ongoing process of learning - community workers are constantly learning new skills, new ways of thinking, new ways of looking at the world, new ways of interacting with others" (Ife, Jim. 1995:210). community workers. Engage in continuous evaluation and feedback to drive continuous change in the community. Evaluation and feedback such as community discussions, consultations, children's club feedback, group discussions after each activity and feedback from community service providers were instrumental in facilitating the participation process. Social workers consistently appreciated the participation of individuals and valued collective efforts at the community level. Sometimes the social worker had to demystify his views on the ascribed characteristics of caste traditions in order to accommodate inclusiveness and general consensus. It is therefore important for the social worker to think carefully before adopting confrontational strategies if necessary.

In this instance social workers played an important role in helping community members, especially children and their parents, to identify skills and community resources (internal and external resources) and services available to them. Children, parents and community members were able to recognize the potential of their community members' skills and expertise. They also learned details about the availability of community resources, services and facilities from community maps, which helped community members identify and locate their resources to use. An example in this regard is the recognition of the importance of the services of Probation Officers and Child Rights Promotion Officers. They used their services to set up Child Protection Committees with the help of their own service providers. Government, non-government organization service providers were also activated during the community participation process. In fact, it may be possible to redevelop and rehabilitate the northern core by making maximum use of local resources. Such a move will always restore the confidence of local communities to promote local activities and should be able to build community confidence, autonomy, self-reliance leading to sustainable development. It was identified as an area where a community worker can facilitate the development of community networks among people, facilitating developmental activities for sustainable development.

Community contribution with maximum use of local resources is essential to promote sustainable community development and reduce dependency issues at micro and macro levels. In this context, the study revealed that social workers played a vital role by linking resources and services to children's clubs and helped to integrate existing services from the government, non-government and private sectors and thereby provide specialized services to GN, PO, CRPO of the Divisional Secretariat through the Children's Club.

Community involvement demonstrated by social workers was an important component of the empowerment process in community development. Participatory processes allow individuals to gain confidence in matters that affect their lives and build self-esteem, learn new skills to develop themselves, sometimes through collective efforts (Onyx, J & Benton, P, 2005). Community involvement results in snowballing/collective influence from individuals, families, groups to the community to achieve/achieve the common goals of the community. At every level, people are encouraged to

participate in development activities spontaneously by creating awareness of their needs, problems, roles and responsibilities. Awareness and spontaneity make them confident. As a result, they take the initiative to solve their own problems. The study found that the effectiveness of community participation varied at different levels.

The feedback from the community in their own words was very encouraging, statements were; The statement "Until now no one like you has come to our society to listen to our needs and problems and work with us" clearly reveals the lack of professional intervention and lack of public appreciation for the proper work of professionally trained social workers. community level. When a community takes on the responsibility of managing their own institutions/committees/groups to become self-reliant, the professional worker should terminate the responsibility of facilitating them. Whenever the community needs professional help, they can contact relevant professionals to facilitate the community development process. Before ending professional roles, technical roles such as managing community organizations, managing financial resources and control, keeping minutes, recording etc. must ensure results, they take the initiative to solve their own problems. The study found that the effectiveness of community participation varied at different levels.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally it can be considered that the levels of community participation at individual, family, group and community level are different for very effective participation but it needs to be facilitated by a professionally trained social worker. Such interventions are critical to organizing and/or mobilizing communities to move away from a state of dependency towards sustainable development of society. The analysis found that some common patterns of community participation emerged based on different understandings of children, families, and social groups identified in the community. Overall these findings highlight a number of issues that require further research before using relevant data to formulate welfare policies related to community level service delivery and service delivery systems and community participation in service use.

The results of the study revealed that community-level participation needs to address two key issues from the perspective of children and families. These problems identified below were related to the unavailability of trained professionals and the involvement of government, non-government and private social welfare service delivery systems and service users (community members) in Sri Lanka.

1. Lack of trained professionals in the delivery of social welfare services
2. Provision of social welfare services without control of service users/beneficiaries

To address the identified issues, alternative strategies need to be developed through further studies using wider coverage. Although ideal solutions to many problems identified at the community level/national level are well known, they are difficult to achieve in the near future. In such situations it seems wise to examine the option of engaging social workers who will intervene in a meaningful way to reconcile and recreate a sense of 'will' 'worth' 'meaningfulness' in the community and increase their participation in ownership. 'The Self Development Process'. In addition, an innovative concept that can be considered meaningful for the enhancement of community decision-making is the concept of "integrated decision-making" in which the community engages with children, families, groups and communities before making value judgments.

Finally, it is hoped that this study, based on data gathered through the intervention of student social workers in two selected communities, will serve as an effective demonstration of evidence-based practice for use in examples of community engagement for community development using community organization methodology. In which student social workers engaged in selfless service highlighted the effective interventions that professionally trained social workers are capable of strategically motivating communities towards a participatory process of community development, while trying to revitalize communities for development through community participation.

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