



COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION TOWARDS EFFECTIVE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

KEYWORDS

Social work, Community Participation, Theories, Models.

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ABSTRACT

Involvement of the community/ people is needed for any developmental activities, schemes or projects for them to be sustainable and successful and it hardly needs any explanation. The importance of community participation in decision making is emphasized in the World Bank's definition of participation as "a process through which stakeholders' influence and share control over development initiatives and resources, and resources that affect them." (World Bank, 1996). Social work is a profession that helps people to help themselves. It aims at empowering people by making them self reliant and self dependent. Hereby adopting community participation methods scientifically, the empowerment can be brought forth in a successful way. In this article the author's tries to bring a basic level understanding about community participation, various degrees of community participation, the theories supporting it and likewise in an inclusive manner.

Introduction

Social work from its initiation is rooted in a participatory manner. But unfortunately, community participation has not got its status in the social work circle. The ultimate aim of the social worker should be the empowerment of the people in the society, so as to deal with their problems in an effective manner by using their resources fruitfully and effectively. It is the social worker in his/her various roles must elicit the participation from the clientele group and various levels of community. So it is a must for every social worker to have ground level knowledge on community participation. The intention of the article is to bring a basic level understanding about the concept of community participation, its underlying dimensions, and supporting theories and so on.

Social Work & Participation

Social work is a profession which help the individuals, groups and communities to get a clear insight into the problems that strengthens their ego to face conditions as reality and then try to improve them. As per the definition by Stroup, Social work is the art of bringing various resources bear on individual, group and community needs by the application of a scientific method of helping people to help themselves. Likewise Boehm has mentioned three functions of social work- restoration of impaired capacity, provision of resources and prevention of social malfunctioning. Clarke has attempted to relate the social work with environment and which makes the environment favourable for the growth of the individual.

From the above definitions and explanations on social work, it is clear that social work has a close association with the mobilisation of resources and it entrust with the social worker as a case worker, group worker, community organiser, social welfare administrator, social actionist or a social work researcher who has to mobilise these resources for the effective application of methods in social work practice. The word 'participation' is directly or indirectly stated as well as its necessity in the primary and secondary methods of social work. In the case of a social case worker, the indirect treatment i.e., environment modification or environment manipulation brings the immediate community to play for the well being of the client. In the case of social group work, the internal and external resources have to be mobilised for the effective group functioning. If a community

organisation is looked into, the community resources have to be identified and mobilised. With regard to social action, the mass mobilisation is highly appreciated to speak for the voiceless. In social welfare administration, the earlier approach of POSDCORB is now replaced by participatory project approach. Likewise in social research, more importance is being given now for the participatory research as well as participation of the respondents in research.

Participation- its meaning & definitions

Participation is a concept understood and conceptualised differently by its users. Here are some of the common definitions for participation.

Participation is defined as a voluntary contribution by the people in one or another of the public programmes supposed to contribute to national development, but the people are not expected to take part in shaping the programme or in criticising its contents. (Leyland, 1991, Economic Commission for Latin America, 1973)

Participation includes people's involvement in decision making process, in implementing programmes, their sharing in benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes (Cohen and Uphoff)

Historical Perspectives of Participation

Understanding the historical side is important as it helps us to know how the different concepts have emerged and how it is shaped to its present form and why it is used and understood differently by its different stakeholders in various contexts. The word participation evolved through a multiple of process and it is still undergoing changes. These changing perceptions are briefly explained.

Typology of Participation

Somesh has charted the classification of participation cited by Pretty (1994) in Pretty et al. (1995).

- Passive Participation: People participate by being told what is going to happen or has already happened.
- Participation in Information Giving: People participate by answering questions posted by extractive researchers using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches.

- Participation by Consultation: People participate by being consulted, and external people listen to views.
 - Participation for Material Incentives: People participate by providing resources, for example labour, in return for food, cash, or other material incentives.
 - Functional Participation: People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project, which can involve the development or promotion of externally initiated social organisations
 - Interactive Participation: People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans, and formation or strengthening of local institutions.
 - Self-mobilisation: People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems.
- Purposes of Participation

Participation is a requirement for various development initiatives. There are Cultural, Cognitive, as well as Structural explanations for people's participation. N. C. Saxena, (1998) says that participation should include the notions of contribution, influencing, sharing or redistributing power and of control, resources, benefits, knowledge, and skills to be gained through beneficiary involvement in decision making. The most important characteristic that brings people together to take action is commonality of interest.

Interest in participation

Form	Top-down	Bottom-up	Function
Nominal	Legitimation	Inclusion	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency	Cost	Means
Representative	Sustainability	Leverage	Voice
Transformative	Empowerment	Empowerment	Means/End

White (2011)

Participation as Means vs End:

Participation as Means	Participation as End
It implies use of participation to achieve some predetermined goal or objective	Participation as an end attempts to empower people
It is an attempt to utilise the existing resources	The attempt is to ensure the increased role of people in development initiatives.
The stress is on achieving the objective and not so much on the act of participation itself.	The focus is on improving the ability of the people to participate
It is more common in the government programmes	NGOs in principle agree with this view point.
Participation is generally short-term	Participation as an end is viewed as a long-term process
Participation as a means , therefore, appears to be a passive form of participation	Participation as an end is relatively more active and dynamic

Somesh Kumar (2002), Oakley et. al. (1991)

Dimensions of participation

Cohen and Uphoff (1980) have delineated three dimensions of participation. They are what kinds of participation, who participates in them and how the process of participation taking place. Wilson and Wilde (2003), have identified four dimensions of

community participation, they are Influence, Inclusivity, Communication and Capacity. Influence which means that have access to and control over resources & equal partner at all stages of the process. Inclusivity ensures all groups and interests in the community can participate, and the ways in which inequality is addressed. Communication means here sharing information with communities and clear procedures that maximise community participation. And finally Capacity is how much support received from both local people and those from partner agencies to develop their understanding, knowledge and skills.

Theories on participation

Sherry Arnstein discusses types of participation and "non participation" in A Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969). The particular importance of Arnstein's work stems from the explicit recognition that there are different levels of participation, from manipulation or therapy of citizens, through to consultation, and to genuine participation. Burns et al (1994) modified Arnstein's ladder of participation and proposed a ladder of citizen power, with more qualitative breakdown of some of the different levels. As a development of this ladder concept of participation Wilcox identifies five interconnected levels of community participation (Wilcox, 1999) His philosophical progression recognises that power is not always transferred in apparently participative processes, but that the processes still have value. Multiple other "ladders" of participation have been presented, most notably Connor's "A new ladder of citizen participation", (1988), Wiedemann and Femers' "Public Participation in waste management decision making; analysis and management of conflicts" (1933) and Rocha's "A Ladder of Empowerment" (1997).

Outcomes and Indicators of Participation

Saxena makes the opinion that participation in decision-making is an important capacity-building process. As people participate in making new decisions and solving problems, learning takes place. It therefore leads to changes in attitude, behaviour, confidence, and leadership. Empowerment is a result of participation in decision-making. An empowered person is one who can take initiative, exert leadership, display confidence, solve new problems, mobilize resources, and undertake new actions. The third outcome as stated is the organisation building. These three outcomes of participation shall vary from project to project. Each project must develop a clearly observable indicator on people's participation, so as to judge whether they are on track or not. Such indicators should then be given to monitors and evaluators, who have to do mid-course and impact assessment.

Participation- Advantages:

- Efficiency: Participation can ensure effective utilisation of available resources.
- Effectiveness: People's participation can make the projects more effective by granting them a say in deciding the objectives and strategies, and by participating in implementation, thereby ensuring effective utilisation of resources.
- Self reliance: With the active involvement of the local people, the mentality of dependency can be broken as well as to increase their awareness, self-confidence, and control of the development process.
- Coverage: People's participation can be a potent way of ensuring the flow of the benefits to the target group.
- Sustainability: People's participation is regarded as an essential prerequisite for the continuity of the activities.

Argument against Participation

Major arguments against people's participation are:

- Participation may lead to a delayed start and slow progress in the initial stages of field work, thereby delaying the

- achievement of physical as well as financial targets.
- An increased requirement of material as well as of human resources to support participation may become necessary because in a participatory process and hence costly method.
- Since participation is a process, once it is initiated the process has to be allowed to take its own course and hence may not move along the expected lines.
- Lots of expectations are generated when community participation takes place, but however that may not be realised.

Community participation in the fields of social work:

Social work's aim is not only to help the individual, the family and the group in their relationships but it is also concerned with the improvement of general social conditions (Misra, 1994). Generally, the social work is practiced in the following fields of social welfare like Child & Youth Development, Women Empowerment, Rural Development, Industrial Development, Health, Environment etc. The mobilisation of resources, contributions as well as having a stake in the affairs by the community makes these programmes of the social worker sustainable, which progress towards the final goal of empowerment. Various participation models have been propounded by researchers, like Dorcsey et al. It is the need of the hour to construct suitable models of community participation in these particular areas of intervention by researchers as well as adopting these by the practitioners in their setting alongside the knowledge generation and sharing by the academia together in effect makes the social work practice successful.

Conclusion

Social work is quite new when compared with its fellow professions, but has flourished over time and is extending its service in almost every sector where human beings are to be counted well. Community participation had its roots from the very beginning of civilisation and has its own story evolved, which was recognised and initiated in implementation in development sphere by 50s and in 80s where the participation boom happened, but still in social work the clutches of participation is very low. Now it is high time for the social work professionals, academicians and researchers to take up this approach in their field of activity for their effective functioning and understanding. It is proved that the far reaching goals could be brought close by using the means of community participation. The authors admit the fact that it may not be applied in every aspect of social work, but where it really applies, it creates a drastic impact.

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