

“Community organizing / basic organization”

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1. INTRODUCTION

Community organizing requires an understanding of the fact that a community is not homogeneous and that a number of dynamics are at play in any one community. A community consists of different individuals who have different aspirations, hopes, fears, thoughts and ideas. A community is also divided into different income streams, gender and generational profiles, education levels, etc. Each community is different from another and as a result, requires different interventions, strategies, partnerships, resources, capacity development opportunities, programmes, approach and networks

2. ASSUMPTIONS

Each community (and/or specific development) is characterized by different elements such as power relations, those who have better skills, knowledge, and resources are able to influence the outcomes of decisions. Communities must be conscious of how and with whom they form partnerships, because partnerships derived at might perpetuate unequal relationships. In the process of community organizing, care must be taken that the process does not become an arena of exclusion, care must be taken that the process strives to include ideas, opinions and thoughts of most, if not all members of the community. Experience has shown that any social process is most likely to be an arena of confrontation, consensus and / or compromise. There is also an assumption that any community structure that will eventually represent the community will be fully representative of all sectors, formations and organizations found in the community/settlement

3. INTENDED OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY ORGANISING

The process of community organizing is intended to be an empowering process, where community members are able to influence development outcomes, contribute meaningfully to the process by providing their own ideas, learn new skills, insights and knowledge of the development process.

The process is intended to narrow the gap between the community and the state institutions, improve communication between communities and the government. The purpose is also intended to mobilize the community so as to speak with a more united voice, eliminate unnecessary division in the community, be able to express their constitutional rights and obligations clearly without ambiguity.

This process acts as a funnel of representation, it provides communities with an opportunity to engage, influence, lobby and pilot some of the ideas and processes that has positive spin-offs for the

community (spin-offs such as an improved social cohesion, social capital, community as an asset that can bargain and enter into effective partnerships).

4. PERSPECTIVES

It is important that all perspectives should be considered in the process, community members want to be acknowledged and listened to, there is no insignificant idea or proposal, the process should assist people to feel that they are fully heard.

Community members need to be empowered so as to be able to engage effectively, capacities need to be developed so that they are able to contribute meaningfully in the process (a programme of capacity building needs to include aspects of conflict management, leadership, negotiation skills, understanding how local government works, planning concepts such as IDP, municipal budgeting, zoning, environmental impact assessment, spatial development plans, development frameworks, land patterns, costing, design, housing options, legislation, process of accessing land, project management and settlement planning, etc..).

It is also important to draw on and use multiple forms of knowledge, the process should create an avenue for community members to tell their stories in any form they deem appropriate i.e. through oral storytelling, illustrations, using their own languages, singing, dancing, drama etc.

Understanding and respecting community protocols is vital, most likely one would have to meet with the ward councillor before one can be welcomed in the area. In some settlements, one would have to meet and introduce oneself to a community "gate-keeper" prior to any engagement with the community.

One needs to anticipate and understand community dynamics, which could include groups / individuals displaying certain characteristics described as follows: "tankers" these are members of the community who are pushy, loud and ruthless in their dealings, "snipers" these are community members who are sarcastic and they like to control, "grenades" these are community members who like to explode in tantrums, and there will also be those "who know it all" they like to dominate.

5. PHASES OF THE COMMUNITY

Understanding the different phases at which different communities may be, is useful to better understand and pre-empt the specific dynamics that could be encountered so that the form of organizing and support can be more effective. The following change phases have been identified:¹

- **Emergent Phase:** this phase is predominately familiar in a situation where there has been a relocation of different communities to a new settlement, this community is often characterized by a state of confusion, where the community does not have a representative structure in place, where nobody is taking charge of the situation, the community asks itself who are they. The community is in a fluid state, there is minimum community participation.

¹ Taken from "A Theory of Social Change" (Doug Reeler, CDRA, undated)

- **Transformative Phase:** in this phase the community is beginning to uncover itself, it begins to confront its fears and doubts, it develops new ideas and a common agenda amongst itself. It begins to unlearn some of its experiences, it starts asking itself what is government thinking about it. It is at this phase that the community is going through a transformation stage. It is at this phase that the community starts asking questions to any facilitator of the process i.e. what is the agenda of the facilitator, what is the facilitator going to benefit from the process and what is the community going to benefit from the process, in this case government or an NGO could be a facilitator.
- **Projectable Phase:** in this phase the community has a representative structure, it is aware of its constitutional rights and obligations, it has knowledge about policy eg. IDP, they use different processes to engage with development processes such as the ward committee, project steering committee, development forum, etc.

6. COMMUNITY ORGANISING PROCESSES

Based on an understanding of the community dynamics, the organizing process can unfold and be supported in a number of ways depending on who initiates the process – government driven or community driven, etc..

Government Driven process	Community driven process
<p>Community meeting: Ward Councillor will assist municipality in calling a public meeting. In this meeting the vision of the settlement will be discussed ideally to share different views about the vision and the most appropriate methods of achieving that common vision. The meeting will most likely agree on the appropriate representative community structure in case there isn't any (or will rely on the ward committee structure / substructures).</p>	<p>Community meeting: Community members called by "concerned group" to talk about the need to be more organised to gauge interest and to articulate their development needs more effectively (questions that they need to consider: support required, resources required, process and structure required to meet their expectations/goals)</p>
<p>Setting up the representative/ elected structure: The purpose of this structure will be to coordinate development in the area, to liaise with government departments / the municipality and partner with possible departments / organizations that will bring resources to the community or that will support the community in accessing resources. If the representative structure is the ward committee, ideally members are elected by the community for 2/5 year period representing different sectors, and chaired by the ward councillor. The different sector portfolios may establish sub-committees to deal with specific issues (eg. land, infrastructure, etc..)</p>	<p>Setting up the representative/ elected structure: Initially an interim structure can be formed whose role would be to prepare for a situational analysis. The information gathered will ideally provide information about the kind of representation required, and information and capacities required.</p> <p>This is the stage where the community could contact relevant institutions/organizations to assist them with organizational development, understanding governmental processes, legal support, etc.</p> <p>Based on this information, a permanent structure can be formed (but noting that this is a long term process)</p>

<p>Meeting of elected structure: In the first meeting of this sector portfolio sub-committee, the meeting should ideally discuss the following issues: reporting mechanism to the ward committee / community, how often, how, where etc, develop terms of reference for the sub-structure, clarify membership (interested persons ideally representative of different community) groups, clarify meeting procedure & roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p>Meeting of elected structure: In the first meeting of this elected structure, the meeting should ideally discuss the following issues: strategic plan, reporting mechanism to the community, how often, how, where etc, develop terms of reference for the structure, clarify membership, clarify meeting procedure, elect specific roles - chairperson, secretariat etc, have members volunteering to develop a memorandum of understanding (MoU) and constitutional guidelines, discuss how to decentralize participation, might want to establish block and street committees, and lastly the structure should give itself a name – for identification purposes and ownership).</p>
<p>Situational analysis: the sub-structure should ideally conduct a situational analysis in the area so that they can understand the area, the need, the people, so as to be able to develop appropriate approaches. A number of participatory methodologies have proved useful eg the sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) can be used as a methodology to determine community assets, capabilities etc, or the participatory appraisal competitive advantage (PACA) methodology to determine the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed development.</p>	<p>Situational analysis: the structure should ideally conduct a situational analysis in the area so that they can understand the area, the need, the people, so as to be able to develop appropriate approaches. A number of participatory methodologies have proved useful eg the sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) can be used as a methodology to determine community assets, capabilities etc, or the participatory appraisal competitive advantage (PACA) methodology to determine the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed development.</p>
<p>Capacity development: Based on above analysis, relevant information sharing and training sessions should be held with community members</p>	<p>Capacity development: Based on above analysis, relevant information sharing and training sessions should be held with community members</p>
<p>Community based planning: The CDWs should ideally facilitate the process of CBP to ensure community needs are expressed and included in the government plans. The councilor should present community plans to council for approval budget consideration.</p>	<p>Community based planning: The community structure should identify appropriate facilitators to ensure community needs are expressed and included in government plans (IDP, spatial plans, UDFs, etc.). At this stage it is useful to link up with appropriate government structures / systems to ensure community participation in development and to lobby for budget allocations</p>
<p>Monitoring: The ward committee and relevant sub-structure should ensure regular monitoring and feedback from ward councilor to community</p>	<p>Monitoring: The structure should provide regular feedback to community and should ensure that relevant role-players remain accountable for their mandates (eg. ward councilor)</p>

7. ROLE-PLAYERS

The community needs to establish linkages and partnerships with other structures whether they are government institutions, or private sector, or NGOs. Their role has to be clarified, their powers, functions, mandate etc. The following roles have generally proved useful:

Government	Organisations of civil society
Create enabling environment (provide political commitment, information, resources, guiding frameworks for community participation)	Social facilitation (support negotiations between government and community members)
Policy development, implementation, monitoring	Capacity development support (relevant training facilitation)
Social facilitation (generally within invited participatory spaces)	Mobilize community members to advocate for their needs and rights
	Demonstrate development approaches
	Input into policy and programme development, implementation, and monitoring

8. FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED

Community organizing must take into consideration the integration of social, economic and political factors. There must be a political commitment from the local government by allocating a budget for this process, there must be a realization that the process of community organizing is an engaging, ongoing process, that requires substantial investment (human resources, time, financial resources, etc.) in the process. The community must be prepared to demonstrate commitment and investment in the process. The need for constant reflection on the process cannot be over-emphasized.