

Community Engagement For Civic Driven Change: Conceptual And Theoretical Framework

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ABSTRACT

In India, we are still forced to witness poverty, marginalization and deprivation. New forms of social exclusion, urban poverty, environmental degradation, conflict and violence have also emerged in the recent past (Verma & Singh, 2016). Ensuring inclusive development, good governance and sustainable development require innovative knowledge, enhanced human competencies and improved institutional capabilities in our country. Nowadays, community engagement approach is receiving more attention, considering that it offers significant benefits to the communities, people and participating institutions (govt. and/or non-govt.). It is expected that this engagement would contribute to sustainable development, peace, wellbeing and the realization of human rights. In view of the increased attention, this paper is an attempt to present conceptual and theoretical framework community engagement. The paper establishes that community participation is absolutely necessary for such engagement and. It also argues that community engagement and participation is pre-requisite to bring about civic driven change.

Keywords: *Community Engagement, Community Participation, Civic Driven Change, Community Mobilization.*

The Concept

Community engagement in its various forms, including service learning, to develop and promote social and civic responsibilities in the people, who are considered stakeholders in two-ways, both agents and beneficiaries of community engagement. In Indian context, community engagement should be given prime importance because of its ability to involve a large number of people in addressing social issues and concerns at macro level in an organized manner. Linking the term 'community' to 'engagement' serves to broaden the scope, shifting the focus from the individual to the collective, with associated implications for inclusiveness, to ensure consideration is given to the diversity that exists within any community. Community engagement is therefore, a planned process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographic location, special interest

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or affiliation, to address issues affecting their well-being. Such an engagement therefore deviates from normal outreach or extension functions to an approach which is more participative and committed to the creation and sharing of knowledge. A working definition of Community engagement that captures its key features is “.....the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices” (CDC, 1997: 9). Community engagement can take many forms, and partners can include organized groups, agencies, institutions or individual collaborators may be engaged in health promotion, research, or policy making. In general, community engagement as defined by the Carnegie Foundation (2014), “is the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity...to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good” (McIlrath (2014: 39-43). Engagement is a core value for the University. It is fundamentally a mutually educative practice. Engagement promotes ‘academic citizenship, central to which is the idea that a university is a collective entity rather than a collection of individuals, asserting the compact between the university and the society (UGC, 2014). According to Ruiz (2014), it is an approach that tries to validate multiple sources of knowledge and promote the use of diverse research methods and the dissemination of the knowledge produced.

Community engagement may be considered as the involvement of people in a community in projects to solve their own problems. When we talk about engagement, it signifies mutual exchange of knowledge between the institutions (govt. or non-Govt.) and communities in an attempt to produce an output which is of benefit to the larger society. It is fundamentally a mutually educative practice. Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people. Such an engagement deviates from normal outreach or extension functions to an approach which is more participative and committed to the creation and sharing of knowledge. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity. It often involves partnerships

and coalitions that help to mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programmes, and practices. Community engagement can take many forms, and partners can include organized groups, agencies, institutions or individual collaborators may be engaged in health promotion, research, or policy making. It is the collaboration between institutions (govt. or non-govt.) and larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources. It is a multifaceted, multi-dimensional umbrella term that may be applied to a vast range of activities. Community engagement can take many forms and partners and can include organized groups, agencies, institutions or individual collaborators those are engaged in health promotion, research or policy making.

The features of community engagement are: (i) It can address multiple issues at the same time, such as democratic governance, gender, environmental concerns, etc.; (ii)It is inclusive of the alliance with local civil society organizations in the search for solutions to common social problems; (iii)It leads to the development of active citizens; (iv)It focuses on both community and institutional benefits; and (v)The process is co-governed by both institutions (Govt. or non-govt.) and communities.

Many of the principles of community engagement have been explored in the course of practice through observation. Basically, these principles are the products of continuous experiences gained from the practice of community engagement, which are: (i) Mutually agreed interests and needs of both institutions (govt. or non-govt.) and communities must be articulated and respected; (ii)Engagement must encompass various aspects including service learning to develop and promote social and civic responsibilities in the people;(iii) Performance assessments of administrators in such institutions (govt. or non-govt.) should include this dimension of community engagement; and (iv)Engagement cutting across various aspects and concerns should be mandated including each segment of the community.

A combination of technical knowledge of the institutions (govt. or non-govt.) and the indigenous or applied knowledge of the community offers a great opportunity for finding sustainable solutions, which cannot be done alone. Active engagement of local residents is essential to improved democratic and service accountability. It enhances social cohesion because communities recognize the value of working in partnership with each other and with statutory agencies. It enhances effectiveness of a programme as communities develop understanding, knowledge and experience essential to the any process. It enables policy to be relevant to local communities. It promotes sustainability of a programme because community members have ownership of their communities.

Thus, community engagement is a structured intervention that gives communities greater control over the conditions that affect their lives. This does not solve all the problems faced by a local community, but it does build up confidence to tackle such problems as effectively as any local action can. Community engagement works at the level of local groups and organizations rather than with individuals or families. A range of local groups and organizations representing communities at local level constitutes the community sector. Community engagement is a skilled process and part of its approach is the belief that communities cannot be helped unless they themselves agree to this process. Community engagement has to look both ways - not only at how the community is working at the grass roots, but also at how responsive key institutions are to the needs of local communities. A good community engagement is action that helps people to recognize and develop their ability and potential and organize themselves to respond to problems and needs which they share. It supports the establishment of strong communities that control and use assets to promote social justice and help improve the quality of community life. It also enables community and govt. or non-govt. agencies to work together to improve the quality of governance.

Community Engagement and Community Participation

Community engagement is not possible without community participation. People participation is very much essential in assessing needs and problems, planning and implementation of programmes and evaluation of the outcome. An important aspect of community engagement is the development of a system of assigning task to the people in order to delegate responsibilities and ensure their participation. For sustainability of a community, it is necessary to develop leadership and build their capacities because it is the community which engages itself. This involves allowing them to use their knowledge and skills and impart trainings in the areas where they lack expertise.

There are several key concepts central to the concept of community engagement approach to effect change in the community, namely: (i) Empowerment; (ii) Community competence; (iii) Community participation or starting from where the people are; (iv) Issue selection; and (v) Creating social consciousness. Community participation is defined as the creation of opportunities to enable all the members of a community to actively contribute or to influence the development process to share equitably the fruits of development.

Arnstein (1969) is of the view that there are eight levels of participation, the highest being citizen with people power. These levels of participation include: (1) Citizen Control; (2) Delegate Power; (3) Partnership; (4) Placation; (5) Consultation; (6) Informing; (7) Therapy; and (8) Manipulation. There are

a number of techniques of community participation in urban administration. The revolution in information technology and wider application of internet has also affected the level of community participation in urban administration. The urban reforms and initiatives of central government in terms of introducing legislations and bringing transparency and accountability in administration have enabled the community in urban areas for their enhanced role in urban development planning and implementation of development programmes and schemes.

Types of community participation are discussed below:

1. **Passive Participation:** People participate by being told what is going to happen or has already happened through unilateral announcement by administration.
2. **Participation in Information Giving:** People participate by answering questions posted by extractive researchers using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches and do not have the opportunity to influence proceedings.
3. **Participation by Consultation:** People participate by being consulted, and external people listen to views and may modify these in the light of people's responses but do not involve them in decision-making.
4. **Participation for Material Incentives:** People participate by providing resources, for example labour, in return for food, cash, or other material incentives, yet people have no stake in prolonging activities when the incentives end.
5. **Functional Participation:** People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project after major decisions have been made.
6. **Interactive Participation:** People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans, and formation or strengthening of local institutions.
7. **Self-mobilization:** People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and the technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used.

Community Engagement for Civic Driven Change

It is an established fact that we all are living in complexed societal situations, some of which are more problematic, such as - environmental degradation, rising unemployment, global economic crisis etc. In such a situation, people

themselves, especially youth are seen as significant agents of change, having the potential to address and solve these challenges. One of the means through which it can achieve the said goal is the practice of community engagement as it implies joint interventions to solve problems that affect a community. Civic driven change is new concept and analytical framework of community action, engagement and social change. The main contribution of civic engagement in terms of social responsibility is the idea of serving the society at large, dealing with real problems of common people and communities, under a vision of ethics and values (GUNi, 2014).

The concept of civic driven change has been evolved in the context of international aid for development in the developing and poor countries. A Think Tank at Institute of Social Studies, Hague is already promoting and popularization of the concept. There has been an increasingly sophisticated and comprehensive review of why aid does not work well. However, analysis and reflection on the why, how and results of aid processes are dominated by stories about the roles, responsibilities, competencies and behaviors of governments and of markets. Governments are may provide a policy and administrative framework for development and bringing change in society. Another assumption is that market-based relations work better than other types of interaction in bringing about the conditions and resources needed for human and planetary well-being. A group of prominent Dutch agencies are of view that it is high time to redress the situation and to explore the merits of citizen-led solutions by rethinking change in societies in ways that take people's efforts into account in their own right. In sum, a starting point was that the numbers, types and linkages between inequalities, crises, vulnerabilities and instability across the world are not matched by the institutions and types of change required to deal with them. But people are not passive in responding to the challenges they encounter in life. The mission, therefore, is one of creating a well-founded understanding of change in society that results from citizen-led solutions. The Institute of Social Studies in The Hague offered a suitable venue for this effort. Its founding values correspond to an image of societies around the world that are just and equitable. It is renowned for post-graduate development studies that permeate the institution with an international perspective and engagements. Thousands of alumni have become civic actors in over a hundred countries. Staff with knowledge, experience and reputation in action-research and policy-oriented studies about nongovernmental organizations, and civil society more broadly, was interested in working on such an effort. In addition, the institute and its leadership are respected within the Dutch development community as a 'neutral'

ground for collaboration between organizations that might contend in other fields.

Civic driven change is an emerging analytical and normative framework about citizen's action and social change. It has originated from a joint initiative by civic actors and academics in the Dutch development sector that were looking for a better theory of change based on citizen action. During 2008, civic driven change initiative was started by several practitioners from Dutch development cooperation agencies and academics from the global North and South (Berkhout et al., 2011). The emerging civic driven change narrative has played a prominent role in national and international discussions around the future of aid, the roles and tasks of development sector and also the position of Dutch development NGOs and their Southern counterparts.

Approaches of civic driven change may be elaborated in the following manner (Fernando & Ruijschoot, 2010):

1. The recognition that anyone can initiate change and that change initiatives start with the desire for change;
2. Searching for an appropriate role for the development sector or 'aided-change';
3. Understanding that CDC is political and addresses power relations;
4. Acknowledging that change can be achieved through cross-sectoral and cross-boundary initiatives by people and groups in different roles;
5. Cooperation for CDC requires trust and a mutual relationship between the collaborating parties; and
6. Sensitivity to risk, dividing the risks of an initiative for change, equally and consciously.

Civic driven change throws a new light on citizenship, the right to have rights, and democracy, focusing on civic action rather than seeing citizens only as rights holders. This requires civic agency: people's capacities, skills and imagination to change society. Promoting social change in this light means stimulating agency of individuals, groups and organizations. A shared perspective on civic agency is to be found in the following propositions and characteristics (Fowler & Biekart, 2008). A primary purpose of civic driven change is to redress development of society that gives pre-eminence to the roles of government and markets at the cost of citizen action to control their well-being now and for future generations. A complex perspective demonstrates why that the results of the civic driven change tasks needed to reach this goal are not predictable. Social change emerges from the combined actions of many actors in ways that are and are not intended by any one of them.

The core processes involved require collective action and collaboration that counters assumptions about the primacy of competition. Key processes also shape how power evolves and is distributed to attain social order at minimum cost for maximum well-being. Complexity analysis opens up an alternative understanding of the role of civic society in gaining the necessary compliance of citizens in this way. It provides a coherent set of categories for debate as well as innovative ideas about how civic society can (re)assert itself towards popular control on socio-political change (Fowler, 2007). Markets need the regulatory enforcement of contracts and protection of ownership. Civic society needs public and other spaces and locations to express divergent interests with the mediation and prevention of conflict and social instability that only a state can provide.

Civic driven change is a set of ideas, thinking and debate about citizen-led change processes in society that has evolved over the last five years as an alternative lens to look at development practice. It is based on the understanding that fundamental change can be achieved by people themselves, as individuals or groups, without being entrenched in the conventional division of society between states, corporations and civil society. Theory on civic driven change has been addressed in the Think Tank Initiative hosted by Institute of Social Studies, Hague during 2007 - 2009. During this process, ten practitioners, academics and activists from around the world identified the need for thinking through and discussing new approaches to social change generated by civic action. This process resulted in the publication of the book titled 'Civic Driven Change: Citizen's Imagination in Action' (Fowler & Biekart, 2008). Civic driven change is not an established theory; it is an emerging approach and concept. Main elements of civic driven change thinking come from existing debates and practices in different contexts. It is built upon the practice, engagement and experience in concrete situations. However, looking at change through a civic driven change lens brings in some innovative ideas and intends to trigger thinking and a renewed focus for those working on social change processes. The civic driven change discourse intends to provide the development sector with a narrative of its own that is more clear and focused on its own pathway of change and priorities.

The three elements of civic driven change convey the meaning and conceptualize the term: (i) Civic (emphasis on citizens, normative, attention for values of actors); (ii) Driven (energies of people, agency); and (iii) Change (multi-sectoral and beyond) 'aid/development'; transformational, political, and structural. The concept of civic driven change is furthermore based on the realization that change is a non-linear, complex and messy process, meaning that change will not occur in an easy way.

Hence, civic driven change thinking introduces the complexity approach

as a way of looking at the communities and how they change. Communities are highly connected systems that have many interacting agents creating self-generated and self-adapting patterns of behaviour which cannot be predicted. In other words, we cannot plan change, but we can influence it.

Community Mobilization

Community mobilization involves developing leadership, strengthening capacities of the people and building self-confidence, so that the sustainability of community engagement for civic driven change can be ensured because it is the community which continues the work. It is a process in which the people work together with mutual consensus in order to address its existing needs and problems. For successful community mobilization, following are the steps:

1. Identifying the issues;
2. Collecting information about laws, policies & programmes, decision makers, sympathizers & opponents etc.;
3. Mobilizing interested people through appeals, letters, exhibitions, posters, leaflets, hand bills, speeches, meetings, signature campaigns, dramas, rallies, demonstrations, street plays, conferences, workshops, symposiums, competitions, exposure through media sources etc.;
4. Networking with persons and organizations;
5. Forming alliances with decision makers and bureaucracy;
6. Forming and sustaining collations;
7. Planning campaigns;
8. Involving media;
9. Building pressure of legislature and decision makers; and
10. Giving desirable directions to the actions.

In a nutshell, community engagement approach is receiving more attention, considering that it offers significant benefits to the society, people and participating institutions (govt. or non-govt.). It is expected that this engagement would contribute to sustainable development, peace, wellbeing and the realization of human rights. However, this is not possible without community participation. People participation is very much essential in assessing needs and problems, planning and implementation of programmes and evaluation of the outcome. Civic driven change is relatively new concept

and analytical framework of community action, engagement and social change for which mobilization is required in order to develop leadership, strengthen capacities of the people and build-up their self-confidence, so that the sustainability can be ensured because it is the community which continues the work. The main contribution of civic engagement is the idea of serving the society at large, dealing with issues and concerns of the people and communities.

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