

Community Facilitation Programme Community Development Module 5: Roles of the Community Development Agents

1. Introduction

What we have learned in the previous model?

- All communities are in need of intervention but certain prevalent conditions necessitate more urgent intervention by change agents.
- Certain variables need to be present to ensure an impact.
- The Grameen Bank project proved many points and dealt with many misconceptions about the abilities of poor people, especially women.

Aim of this module:

In this module we want to establish the difference between community development agents or change agents, a term that we have used freely up to now, and other role-players in the community development process. In addition, we want to define the roles of the community development agent. This module will also help any person who is either involved in or who would like to become involved, to find clarity on his or her role and relationship in the community development process.

2. Who are the Key Role-players in the Community Development Process?

For the purpose of this module we distinguish between four key role-players, referred to as community development agents, namely the community developer, field workers, sectoral developers and experts and consultants. Let us look at their roles individually.

2.1 Community Development Agents

Up to now in this workshop we have often referred to community developers, a term interchangeably used with change agents. At this point it is necessary to clarify the status of this person, and also that of community development workers. This term is used by the Department of Social Development for workers participating in their community development initiatives as a result of a special Presidential Programme.

2.1.1 Community Development Workers

Community Development Workers or CDW's are community based resource persons who collaborate with other community activists to help fellow community members to obtain information and resources from service providers with the aim of learning.

"The Handbook for Community Development Workers in South Africa" a publication that resulted from the Presidential Programme defines CDW's as follows:

"They are community based resource persons who collaborate with other community activists to help fellow community members to obtain information and resources from service providers with the aim of learning how to progressively meet their needs, achieve goals, realize their aspirations and maintain their well-being. They are cadres of a special type, participatory change agents who work within communities from where they are selected, where they live, and to whom they are answerable for their activities."

CDW's are distinguished from what the Presidential Programme refers to as professional development workers, in that they are limited in their training and don't have

tertiary training. What they call professional development workers we refer to as community developers and as mentioned earlier they are professionals that are trained and equipped to implement and oversee a community development process.

CDW's are further distinguished in that they:

- Live in the communities in which they work. Know the people and their needs and respect them.
- Know the community leaders and acknowledge them in their roles.
- Are accustomed with community structures and networks.
- Understand the importance of partnerships of which they will become a part of.
- Are in a position to gather and exchange information about the community and its members

CDW's have an distinct advantage in that they are residents of a community and therefore know the community so much better than any change agents coming from outside of the community.

2.1.2 Community Developers

These are trained professionals usually with a tertiary background in social development studies.

- They are in control of the project and therefore responsible to oversee the planning and implementation.
- They form a link between the community and external role-players.
- They have one or more field workers under them and dependent on the cooperation of volunteers.

2.1.2 Field workers

These workers are similar in position to the CDW's. For the aim of the module and this workshop we prefer to refer to them as field workers due to the familiarity with their role in the process:

- They are also called village workers, development assistants and community aid workers.
- They are not qualified in a professional field.
- Their qualification requirements are determined by their employers and equipped through in-service training under the guidance of a community developer.
- The majority of people involved in a project belongs to this group.

Field workers can fulfil their functions voluntarily or they can be remunerated.

2.4 Sectoral Developers

- They are persons who directly contribute to the development of specific sectors or spheres in the community. They are usually the experts in that specific sphere and are already employed.
- They are often unaware of their contribution.
- They are skilled and trained in a professional role for instance as engineers, health care workers, educators etc.

They are engaged in a project mainly in an advisory capacity, similar in function to the role of board member of a management board. They are not remunerated by

the project.

2.5 Experts and Consultants

They seldom enter into direct interaction with the members of the community. They provide expert advice and/or technical and research assistance to the organization overseeing the project. They are employed or self employed and can work on a consultancy basis.

Where do you fit in?

At this point in time it might be worthwhile to pause for a minute to consider your own involvement in a specific community or even in the community in which you stay. Here are a few questions to get you thinking:

- What is it in your community that bothers you the most?
- Is there someone doing something about it?
- Do you see yourself becoming involved in addressing the need?
- If so in what capacity do you see yourself getting involved; as the developer, field worker, sectoral developer or expert or consultant?

3. Roles of Community Development Agents

Two of the positions and their unique roles need to be discussed in more depth. These are the roles of the community developer and the field worker.

3.1 Community Developer Roles.

Its required from the community developer to be able to fulfil a range of roles and to perform a diverse range of tasks related to every role. The nature of the project will determine which of the roles will be important for a specific project.

- **Enabler/Facilitator.** The key role of the community developer is to facilitate the community development process. He must have the ability to create an awareness for the discomforts a community faces in a way that the community members experience it as their "journey of discovery". He must be able to involve community members in this journey, right from the beginning with the necessary interest and passion to sustain a long term process.
- **Expert.** He is in a position to provide the community with the means of assessing their needs and have the know-how to interpret the findings and to present them in a way that will make sense to everyone. It requires at times to present the reality of the situation in a way that might lead to discomfort. Additionally, he needs to supply information about the resources in the service system and the way in which desired outcomes can be transferred into tangible goals.
- **Guide/Broker.** Often it is necessary to act on behalf of the community and to represent them elsewhere; Particularly when recognised community leaders are absent. This is one of the less favoured roles as it requires perseverance to lobby on their behalf.
- **Organizer.** This goes far beyond the event of organising meetings and events and includes the ability to utilize the dynamics of the process to its benefit.
- **Coordinator.** This implies that the community developer will enable everyone involved to work together to avoid unnecessary duplication, effort, and conflict.
- **Motivator.** To help community members to move away from a situation where they are isolated or where they isolate themselves, and to gather them with

the aim of enthusing them with the prospect that their combined efforts will have a positive outcome. Once the process has started and has got some momentum, it is important to keep that momentum as the absence of immediate results very quickly demotes everyone involved in the process.

- Researcher. Several methods are available for community developers to establish the scope of problems in communities. Some of them are dealt with later. Information about problems in communities on national and provincial databases are much more accessible than before. It is an easier task nowadays to gather information. A simple tool like Google maps and Google earth can also be very helpful. Street view images of informal communities should be available to the public not too far in the future.
- Educator. Community Developers have the task to educate community members about problem-solving approaches and skills.
- Administrator. He is responsible for the successful implementing of action plans that are usually formulated in some kind of policy document.
- Mediator. Conflict is mostly unavoidable in any development process as personalities, differences, personal interests and different opinions often surface not far into the process. It is therefore necessary to have a person that can resolve disputes between two or more parties to the point where some kind of settlement is reached. The entities can be an individual, a group or a organization or government department. A person fulfilling the role of a mediator is usually a third party, in this case the community developer.
- Negotiator. Very similar in role to that of mediator but more focussed on solving problems where parties have a disagreement and they need to get to some kind of agreement upon a course of action. The negotiator does not need to be a third party.
- Advocate.
- Activist. A less popular role, especially where communities are paralysed and powerless because of their own inabilities. Since the civil rights movement gained momentum during the sixties it became more acceptable for groups and individuals to become legal activists for their cause. In fact, in some communities it is becoming the prerequisite for matters to progress and for issues to get resolved.
- Agitator. Also very unpopular but sometimes it requires to be a pain in someone's neck to get a response.

Some of these roles do not fit our personalities by nature, especially those that require a person to deviate from his or her normal behaviour patterns and personality styles. It usually results in that person becoming a bit uneasy within that role. By nature most of us are born with the tendency to negotiate, to organise and to motivate but very few of us are born agitators and activists. Nevertheless for a successful project almost all the time the above range of roles will be required at some time or other.

3.2 Field Worker Roles.

Field workers distinguish themselves in that they relate to the community at grass-roots level and are perceived as one of the community. It is therefore much easier for them to act in the role of interpreter, communicator and motivator, key roles which they need to fulfil. In addition a willingness to learn the necessary administrative skills that will enable them to become good organizers is essential.

4. A Case Study

Learning from a model village: A comprehensive programme to address food insecurity in a Dalit Village in Nepal.

United Missions to Nepal (UMN), an FBO, has worked with the Dalit community (the so called untouchables) since 1999 in the district of Mugu, in the Himalayan region. Only five percent of the land in the district can be used for agriculture, due to steep slopes, poor soil quality, a dry climate and deforestation. UMN partnered with a local advocacy group, the National Dalit Development Forum who was involved in advocacy work for the Dalits.

After a consultative process between the community, the UMN and the NDDF, it was decided to implement a model village that would empower the Dalit community to achieve food security. One village consisting of 19 families was chosen for the project. UMN staff helped NDDF and community representatives to design and implement an action plan. The program also considered the social, economic and educational factors (spheres) that contributed to poverty. Key desired outcomes of the programme were:

- Production of food crops.
- Veterinary care and animal management.
- Establishment of a nursery where trees were grown.
- Immunisation and family planning services.
- Sanitation improvements.
- Savings and credit schemes.
- Community education.
- Training of community leaders.

Non-formal education was a key entry point to reaching the community. It initially focussed on reading and writing skills and gradually expanded to include practical education and the provision of scholarships for children. Adults were educated about family planning, sanitation, child health, hygiene, immunisation and nutrition as well as household management and environmental issues. NDDF took responsibility for overseeing the programme while the UMN provided support. Some of the results of the project were:

- Every household had their own food garden.
- A seed bank was established for maize and wheat.
- Plantations and slope land management practices were introduced on steep slopes to combat erosion.
- A tree nursery was established.
- Every family member could explain the basic importance of nutrition, health and hygiene.
- All children were enrolled at school and women who attended the literacy classes could read and write.
- A great awareness by mothers for the immunisation of their children.
- Community members' self esteem had improved.
- Community members had more liberty as a result of the advocacy efforts to visit development organizations and government agencies to request various services.

The programme was extremely successful in securing food security. The rest of the project outcomes contributed to reducing poverty in an integrated way. Key to the success of the project was the empowerment of community members. From this brief outline the interplay between the different role-players could be observed and many of the roles discussed earlier, observed. Although not discussed in detail, some elements of the community development process could be recognised. This is the topic for the next module.

4. Conclusion

In this module we have studied more closely who are the key role-players in the

community development process. It was established that the community development process very seldom originated without the help from the developers.

