

Research article

UTILIZING HUMAN CENTERED DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SELF HELP COMMUNITY PROJECTS

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Abstract

It is great when a group of people come together and decide to start a project for their community. But starting a project requires a lot of effort, and not everyone is willing to put in as much or as often as they say they will. Successful projects have a group of dedicated volunteers who actively promote the project, so others will help, too. Such community project could be actualized through a self help approach in which residents organize themselves and become involved at the level of a living area or a neighborhood, to improve the conditions of daily life (water, sanitation, health, education). It comprises various degrees of individuals or collective involvement (financial and/or physical contributions, social and/or political commitment) at different stages of a project. The logic behind self help community project is that individual effort or community effort determines their fate. This philosophy of development is an attempt made to enlist and inspire the people in the determination of desirable change in goals

and in the implementation of programmes to bring about the change deemed desirable. However, this mission cannot be accomplished in oblivion. Therefore, there is need for a credible paradigm such as human centered development strategies which if properly utilized will aid in planning and implementation of such people oriented project in the community. This paper discusses self help community projects, human centered development strategies; strategies for planning and implementation of self help community projects. Thereafter, it recommends that rural dwellers should be enlightened on the need and importance of adopting human centered development strategies in the planning and implementation of self help community projects. They should be encouraged to participate in self help community projects with all their capabilities and help to ensure successful planning and execution of such projects.

Keywords: development, strategies, planning, implementation, self-help, community, projects.

Introduction

Today, people around the world are organizing as never before to address the problems they face in their communities and their daily lives. Around the world today, there is a vast outpouring of civic energy and vitality aimed at advancing people's interests at the local level in the face of unrelenting economic and social pressures that are changing traditional customs and ways of life. Especially now, when foreign aid resources fall far short of needs, social and economic development requires the vital spark of people and communities engaged in self-reliant actions that will better their lives (Bruce, 2005). Above all else, development is people and families working hard at the community level to improve their lives and the community in which they live. But too often, the structures that provide development assistance disempower rather than invigorate local organizations and communities. Too often local community initiative and individual enterprise are undercut rather than fostered by conventional development assistance and government development programs (Festus, 2010). Therefore, human-centered development strategies seems to be a credible option to adopt in the planning and implementation of community projects, especially the ones that are self help oriented.

Human-centered development is an approach to development that focuses on improving local communities' self-reliance, social justice, and participatory decision-making. It recognizes that economic growth does not inherently contribute to human development (Korten, 2004) and calls for changes in social, political, and environmental values and practices. Laura (2010) adds that human-centered development can be seen as a process in which community members are involved at different stages and degrees of intensity in the project cycle with the objective to build the capacity of the community to maintain services created during the project after the facilitating organizations have left. Human centered development throughout the whole project, thus from project planning and implementation to evaluation, ensures the reflection of community priorities and needs in the activities of the project and motivates communities into maintaining and operating project activities after the project is completed.

Human centered development is propelled by some plausible strategies. Strategy is a careful plan or method for achieving a particular goal usually over a long period of time (Dan, 2011). It is the skill of making or

carrying out plans to achieve a goal. Human centered development strategies may include an identification of stakeholders, establishing systems that allow for engagement with stakeholders by public officials, development of a wide range of participatory mechanisms among others (Laura, 2010). Stakeholders are individuals who belong to various identified 'communities' and whose lives are affected by specific policies and programs, and/or those who have basic rights as citizens to express their views on public issues and actions. Human-centered development is piloted by many actors which include the private sectors.

The private sector is a central actor in human-centered development. While governments woo major global corporations, communities turn to microenterprise income generation via the informal sector. One of the major new ideas in international development in the past decade has been the creation of "people's banks" and other mechanisms to provide credit to people and groups at the community level to finance and stimulate such local entrepreneurial activity (Nathan, 2008). In a time of shrinking foreign aid and shrinking government resources for social programs, the search for greater self reliance from different sources of private sector income has swept the national, provincial and local levels in many countries (Damian, 2004). Community development practitioners must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions.

Communities, too, are turning to the private sector for essential human services in education, community development, health care, water and sanitation, and other areas. Here the private providers are typically people from the local community who perform these services for fees as part of the informal economy. Or, increasingly, they are self-help groups organized at the community or regional level essentially as private voluntary non-profit groups that derive their operating income from a blend of contributions, foreign aid grants, and user fees (Okoye, 2010).

The linking of market forces with community development is widely seen as one of the best ways to engage the private sector in human-centered development. Yet the globalizing force of the market often draws capital, technology, infrastructure, information and knowledge-building away from local communities and low income areas. As a result, local entrepreneurial energy and talent generally receives an unfairly low share of access to the market, and economic benefits flow to these localities much less than they could (Veron, 2007). Banking with the poor and locally focused venture capital, commercialization and marketing support companies are among the strategies being explored to bring more of the benefits of private sector growth to poor communities.

Community-based civil society organizations lie at the heart of human-centered development. They are formed by local people to solve local problems through self-reliant community action. Through these civil society channels, people are seeking ways to gain information, training, technology, credit and capital, and access to markets in order to increase their incomes and improve their circumstances (Amoge, 2009). These are the needs that lead people to form civil society groups. The objectives of this paper are to converse the concept of self help community projects, and how human centered development strategies can be utilized in the planning and implementation self help community projects.

Conceptual Analysis

For the purpose of conceptual clarification and to limit the level of ambiguity, which as a rule is the hallmark of academic research, it is important to examine some of the concepts and terms that are used in this paper i.e. development, strategies, planning, implementation, self-help, community, projects.

Development

Development is a specified state of growth or advancement; a new and advanced product or idea; an event constituting a new stage in a changing situation.

Strategies

Strategy is a high level plan to achieve one or more goals under conditions of uncertainty. Strategy is important because the resources available to achieve these goals are usually limited. It generally involves setting goals, determining actions to achieve the goals, and mobilizing resources to execute the actions.

Planning

Planning is one of the most important project management and time management techniques. Planning is preparing a sequence of action steps to achieve some specific goals. If a person does it effectively, he can reduce much the necessary time and effort of achieving the goals. A plan is like a map. When following a plan, the individual can always see how much he have progressed towards his project goal and how far he is from his destination.

Implementation

Implementation is the carrying out, execution, or practice of a plan, a method, or any design for doing something. As such, implementation is the action that must follow any preliminary thinking in order for something to actually happen. In community project context, implementation encompasses all the processes involved in getting new project executed successfully.

Self help

Self-help, is a self-guided improvement (Gary, 2007)—economically, intellectually, or emotionally—often with a substantial psychological basis. Many different self-help group programs exist, each with its own focus, techniques, associated beliefs, proponents and in some cases, leaders (Micki, 2005). It is the act or state of providing the means to help oneself without relying on the assistance of others. It is the practice of solving one's problems by joining or forming a group designed to help those suffering from a particular problem.

Community

A community is a social unit of any size that shares common values. In human communities, intent, belief, resources, preferences, needs, risks, and a number of other conditions may be present and common, affecting the identity of the participants and their degree of cohesiveness.

Community is "as a group or network of persons who are connected (objectively) to each other by relatively durable social relations that extend beyond immediate genealogical ties, and who mutually define that relationship (subjectively) as important to their social identity and social practice." (Chavis, 2006).

Project

A project is a temporary endeavor designed to produce a unique product, service or result with a defined beginning and end (usually time-constrained, and often constrained by funding or deliverables), undertaken to meet unique goals and objectives, typically to bring about beneficial change or added value.

Community Project

A community project is a term applied to any community-based project. This covers a wide variety of different areas within a community or a group of networking entities. Projects can cover almost anything, including the most obvious section of concern to any community, the welfare element. Welfare community projects would for example be, a locally run and locally funded orphanage; a Christmas dinner kitchen for the homeless. Another important sector of importance to the community would be charity. Charitable projects in the community can include, but are not limited to, ecological charities concerned with either the maintenance of green spaces, or in some cases, the prevention of the reduction/removal of green spaces. An old clothes collection service would also be a community-based charity project (Wikipedia, 2014). One important subdivision of community projects, and at times overlooked, is those of an economic nature such as road construction, construction of market, shopping plaza, rural electrification among others. However, a community project can be self help driven.

Self help community projects

Self help community project is an empowerment strategy which enables local people to exploit to their advantage community human and material resources which would otherwise lie dormant and perpetuate ignorance and poverty. It enables the people to embark on development projects through their concerted efforts with little or no help from the government. The main thrust of self help community project is high degree of citizen involvement that can only be assured where the initiative of the people is sufficiently stimulated to arouse their enthusiasm and wholehearted involvement (Anyanwu, 2002). However, the response and enthusiasm towards self help community projects come out of the realization that the government cannot provide all the needs of the people. Ogolo (2005) views people's participation as an act through which the beneficiaries of a development effort share in the identification of the development priorities, planning, implementation consumption and evaluation of the development programs.

Self help community projects are community initiated small sustainable projects through self help approach. This approach gives members the opportunity to focus on felt need project which can be easily managed by the community members themselves. Examples are garden fencing, provision of wells in gardens, schools and in villages, construction of cereal banks, fencing of schools, provision of milling machines and power tillers, provision of school furniture, support for income generating activities like tie & dye, soap making and tailoring for women's groups, among others. Infact, self help approach to community projects is a new paradigm in the field of rural development, whose main goal is rural development. Specific objectives of the approach are to increase the well-being of the poor people, and provide infrastructural facilities. It is a voluntary and self-managed group of people belonging to similar socio-economic characteristics, who come together to initiate ideas that will promote

sustainable development. Some mega projects can be executed in the community milieu through a self help initiative. Such projects may include: health facilities (health center, maternity, and dispensary), market stalls, roads, schools, post office, wells, boreholes, pipe-borne water and electricity. Self help community projects can be actualized by maximum utilization of human centered development strategies. This can be described as an ultimate self help approach to realizing community projects.

Human Centered Development Strategies

Human centered development strategies are high level plan to achieve one or more goals under conditions of uncertainty by well resourced persons. They are plans to commence and successfully complete a particular project work, especially in a community setting by some competent individuals. Human centered development strategies are important in the planning and implementation of self help community projects because the resources available to achieve these projects are usually limited. It generally involves setting goals, determining actions to achieve the goals, and mobilizing resources to execute the actions by some determined individuals. Human centered development strategies are a veritable scheme that can be religiously utilized for successful planning and implementation of self help community projects.

Strategies for Planning Self help Community Projects

Human centered development strategies for planning of self help community projects are based on a shared vision of the community which builds on the aspirations of different socio-economic groups within the community. Visions are realistic and achievable as people look to the future and articulate where they would like to go in terms of the development of their community (Nnamdi, 2009). The visioning process should flow from a review of people's assets and existing services. Clear steps should be followed and these will help the community to work towards their vision. Further, by not focusing on constraints and looking to opportunities, it helps the community to build on the strengths of its current situation.

Human centered development strategies for planning self help community projects are:

Preparing to set sail – it will cover what should be done before a community start to write their plan. This includes researching the issue or opportunity and the potential benefits and impact (i.e., what support is available and who should be at the table).

Charting the course – it will cover what should be included in the plan once all the preparation work, research and networking is complete. The plan is a practical tool that prospective funders will use to judge the potential of the idea and to engage the community. The success in attracting funding support will depend greatly on the ability to provide a clear picture of the proposed activity.

Building the right crew - It is crucial to have the right people at the table to best complement and advance the objectives. Consider who should be consulted with to help further refine the project (e.g., community organizations, potential users, businesses, community sponsors, and advocates). In addition, the community should consider not only who will be needed to develop and implement the project, but also who will support its ongoing operations (e.g., municipalities, associations, charity organizations, etc.).

Finding a program that fits – Focusing on target potential funding agencies that are best positioned and most appropriate to the community idea. Potential funding organizations could be consulted in advance to make sure the community idea is a “fit” with their programs.

The following provides insight on the four key elements of a well-written plan:

1. **Description:** The project team and the project objectives, including all community partnerships and support for the project;
2. **Dates:** The project start date and end date, as well as all steps to be taken and their estimated timelines;
3. **Deliverables:** The project deliverables (outputs) and ultimate impact (outcomes); and
4. **Resources:** The human and financial resources (inputs) required and where those resources will come from.

Strategies for implementing Self help Community Projects

Implementation is the stage where all the planned activities are put into action. Before the implementation of a project, the implementors (spearheaded by the project committee or executive) should identify their strength and weaknesses (internal forces), opportunities and threats (external forces). The basic human centered development strategies for starting the implementation process of self help community project is to have the work plan ready and understood by all the actors involved. Technical and non-technical requirements have to be clearly defined and the financial, technical and institutional frameworks of the specific project have to be prepared considering the local conditions (Gamin, 2008). The working team should identify their strengths and weaknesses (internal forces), opportunities and threats (external forces). The strengths and opportunities are positive forces that should be exploited to efficiently implement a project. The weaknesses and threats are hindrances that can hamper project implementation (Cosmos, 2010). The implementers should ensure that they devise means of overcoming them. Another basic requirement is that the financial, material and human resources are fully available for the implementation. According to Nathan (2008), other actions need to be taken before work can begin to implement the detailed action plan, including:

- Scheduling activities and identifying potential bottlenecks.
- Communicating with the members of the team and ensuring all the roles and responsibilities are distributed and understood.
- Providing for project management tools to coordinate the process.
- Ensuring that the financial resources are available and distributed accordingly.

Field management staff must make time to establish an atmosphere of candour and trust with partners during implementation so that concerns may be raised (and often resolved) informally. Realistic long-term planning

of finances is key to the implementation of an action plan in accomplishing a self help community project (Bruce, 2005). A communication strategy can be used to raise awareness of the positive benefits for the community, as well as explaining that there are necessary trade-offs, such as the introduction of water pricing, which will not please everybody. This will help to further strengthen local ownership of the plan and encourage public participation in the implementation of self help community projects (Festus, 2010). At the end of a planning and implementation cycle, a press release is useful to highlight successful stories and announce the publication of a final document such as a work report. Expectations among stakeholders and the general public are likely to be high following the participatory approach to the development of the preceding stages of the planning process. It is therefore important that actions are visible and demonstrate tangible results early to build confidence in the process.

Methodology

This paper is predominantly based on information derived from secondary sources. Hence much of the data were accessed through the review of relevant texts, journals, newspapers, official publications, magazine and the internet which served as a tangible source of insight on utilizing human centered development strategies in the planning and implementation of self help community development.

Implication

Self-help approach to community project is a new paradigm in the field of rural development, whose main goal is rural development. Specific objectives of the approach are to increase the well-being of the poor people, and provide infrastructural facilities. It is a voluntary and self-managed group of people belonging to similar socio-economic characteristics, who come together to initiate ideas that will promote sustainable development. The self-help approach of community project in the form of undertaking economic programmes, provide employment, infrastructures that a community can provide for themselves, acquainted with skills and occupational diversification. Also, it provides social welfare programmes to improve health, nutrition and general community welfare. However, initiative can be successfully planned and implemented through human centered development strategies utilization.

Conclusion

Human centered development strategies are an ideal blueprint for planning and implementing self help community projects if properly utilized. Self-help community projects are focused on local participation by the people who identify their needs, plan, take decisions and implement them to enhance their living standard. The idea involves the spirit of “give and take”, joint efforts, social cooperation and self-reliance. Locally, people are advised to say their problems with the view to finding answers to them, depending on their initiatives, this involves the provision of technical and social support services on a mutual basis. Through self-help, unused local resources like the government funds are reserved, and the people at the local level acquire skills, become competent and confident in the management of their affairs. Self-help connotes more food for the needy, better health, better primary

/secondary education, developed infrastructure, self-satisfaction and self-accomplishment in the life of rural dwellers.

Recommendations

Human centered development strategies should be properly utilized in the planning and implementation of self help community projects. Rural dwellers should be enlightened on the need and importance of adopting human centered development strategies in the planning and implementation of self help community projects. They should be encouraged to participate in self help community projects with all their capabilities and help to ensure successful planning and execution of such projects. Representatives should be elected to speak on behalf of local people at the government level, and should be able to attract projects to their various communities or canvas for government financial assistance as they embark on self help community projects.

Before rural communities can make attempts to impact public policy or an intervention especially the one that has to do with self help community project, it is important that they have an understanding of the policy-making process itself. Understanding the policy-making process can help individuals and community-based organizations decide whether they will become involved in trying to develop or change a policy and, if so, how to best go about it. In order for communities to fully participate in self help community projects, it is necessary for their members to have access to resources. These resources include adequate funding, government training programs, education, leaders, and volunteers to support rural causes and initiatives. Rural citizens should learn about and access information about government programs and services that is understandable, concise and timely.

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