Community Organisation as a Method of Social Work

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Introduction

Community Organisation is one of the primary methods of social work. It deals with intervention in the communities to solve the community problems. As a method of social work, community organisation can solve the problems of many people in the community through their collective involvement. Community organisation and community development are inter-related as two sides of a same coin. The community organisation includes other methods of social work, that is, group work, and casework. The power structure plays a role in community organisation. The social workers need to know the community power structure to practice community organisation method, which is used for empowering people for their development. The details are provided for social work students to understand and practice community organisation effectively.

Community Organisation as Macro Method

Community organisation is considered as a Macro method of practice in social work. (Arthur E. Fink) It is used for solving community problems. The term Macro is used because of its ability to involve a large number of people in solving the social problems. Community organisation is a macro method because this method can be successfully implemented at

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local level of community, or at state level and at regional levels of the community or even at the international level. For example, community organisation can help in pollution control at local, state, regional, national and international levels. It is a macro method because unlike casework which deals with only one person at a time or group work which deals with limited number of participants, community organisation deals with large number of people at any given time. For example, Poverty cannot be solved by using individual approach like casework as there are many people affected by poverty. Individual approach is not practical where the magnitude of the problem is alarming. In such cases we have to use a method, which can help a large number of people. While comparing other methods of social work community organisation as macro method is useful for solving widespread economic and social problems like poverty.

Community Organisation as a Problem Solving Method

In community organisation method the community is the client. Community organisation solves the community problems and fulfills the needs of the community. Many of the community problems like social injustice, poverty, inadequate housing, poor nutrition, lack of health, lack of medical services, unemployment, pollution, exploitation, bonded labour system, illicit arrack, dowry, female infanticide, women and children trafficking, drug trafficking etc. can be solved by using community organisation method. In problem solving generally there are three basic aspects. These are study, diagnosis, and treatment. First the problem has to be studied. For this, we have to collect information regarding the problem. From the information collected we have to identify the main causes. This is called diagnosis. Based
on the findings, or diagnosis, a solution is evolved that is called treatment. We consider this model as medical model because doctors study the patient to find out the causes for illness and based on findings, treatment or medicines are prescribed. Such a model can be used in community organisation method. Problems can be solved only with involvement of people due to which resources are mobilized to solve the problems. This method is specially applicable in Indian situations, because in India a large number of people are affected by poverty or other poverty related problems which need speedy solutions. For this community organisation as a problem solving method is most effective to solve community problems. For example people in certain area suffer due to lack of water for their cultivation. With the help of the community organiser and people’s participation, watersheds can be made and ground water level is increased. Water stored during rainy season can help the people to continue cultivation. Here the whole village problem is related with water for irrigation and drinking purpose, which can be solved by using community organisation method.

Community Organisation method is used for the following:

a) To meet the needs and bring about and maintain adjustment between needs and resources in a community.

b) Helping people effectively to work with their problems and plan to realize their objectives by helping them to develop, strengthen, and maintain qualities of participation, self-direction and cooperation.

c) Bringing about changes in community and group relationships and in the distribution of decision-making power.
d) The resources of the community are identified and tapped for solving the community problems.

**Relevance of Community Organisation for Community Development**

Community organisation and community development are interrelated. To achieve the goals of community development the community organisation method is used. According to United Nations, community development deals with total development of a developing country, that is their economic, physical, and social aspects. For achieving total development community organisation is used. In community development the following aspects are considered as important. The same aspects are also considered important by community organisation. They are,

a) Democratic procedures
b) Voluntary cooperation
c) Self-help
d) Development of leadership
e) Educational aspects.

All the above aspects are related with community organisation. (a) Democratic procedures deal with allowing all the community members to participate in decision-making. It is possible to achieve this by community organisation. The selected or elected members or representatives are helped to take decisions. Democratic procedures help people to take part in achieving community development goals. Community organisation method permits democratic procedures for people’s participation. (b) Voluntary cooperation means that the people volunteer for their participation. For this they are convinced. They should feel that they should involve themselves in the process of development without hesitation. This attitude is
supported by community organisation method. People’s emotional involvement is necessary to make success of the community organisation method. If discontentment about their conditions is created, then people will volunteer for participation. Community organisation emphasizes the discontentment aspect only to make them initiate people’s participation. (c) Self-help is the basis for community development. Self-help deals with the capacity of mobilizing internal resources. Self-help is the basis for self-sufficiency and sustainable development. In community organisation self-help is emphasized. Community organisation is relevant to community development because both emphasizes the self-help concepts. (f) Development of leadership is an important aspect in community development. Leadership deals with influencing and enabling people to achieve the goals. Community organisation also emphasizes leadership. With the help of leaders the people are motivated to participate in action. Community organisation is a relevant method to develop and use leadership. This is applicable for community development also. (g) Educational aspects in community development means helping people to know, learn, and accept concepts of democracy, cooperation, unity, skill development, effective functioning etc. In community organisation also the above mentioned aspects are considered very important. The process of community organisation emphasizes education of the community. Thus both are emphasizing the educational aspects for the progress of the community. Thus community organisation and community development are interrelated and mutually supportive. There are no opposing aspects in between community organisation and community development as both emphasize democratic method and self-help principles. Thus they are relevant. So in all community development programmes community organisation method is used as implementing method.
Distinction between Community Organisation and Community Development

There are many similarities between community organisation and community development. But for theoretical purpose it is possible to differentiate community organisation and community development.

a) Community organisation is a method of social work but community development is a programme for a planned change.

b) Community organisation emphasizes the processes, but community development emphasizes the end or goals.

c) Community organisers are mostly social workers and social change agents. But community development personnel can be from other professions including agricultural experts, veterinary experts, and other technical experts.

d) Community organisation is not time bound. It is achieved step by step according to the pace of the people. But community development is time bound and time is specified for achieving the development objectives.

e) In community organisation people’s participation is important. But in community development people’s development is important.

f) In community organisation governments and external agencies assistances are not important or needed. But in community development external assistance from the government or other agencies is considered important.

g) Community organisation is a method of social work and this method is used in many fields.
But unlike community organisation community development is considered as process, method, programme, and movement for planned change.

h) Community organisation is used in all the fields but community development is used mostly in economic development and for the development of living standards of the people.

i) In community organisation planning is initiated by the people through their participation. But in community development planning is carried out by an external agency mostly by the government.

j) In community organisation people are organised to solve their problem. But in community development goals have to be achieved and for that people are organised.

k) Community organisation is universal to all communities. But community development programmes differ from people to people depending upon whether the area is rural, urban or tribal, and other characteristics of the area.

Even though there are differences, both are interrelated. The relationship is so close, so that community organisation process and principles are accepted fully. Both are like two sides of the same coin. The ideal community development takes places where community organisation method and its various steps and principles are effectively put into practice.

**Working with Individuals, Families, and Groups within The Community**

Individuals join together and form groups and families. Families and groups join together and form communities. While working with communities we
have to work with individuals, families, and groups. In the practice of social work, distinction between different at social work methods do not have clear boundaries. All are carried out based on the situation. In community organisation the organiser has to work with individuals. Individual contact strategy is used to create awareness. Individually people are motivated to accept community goals through education and awareness generation. Working with individuals takes much time but it is very effective and successful. Working with families and groups is important in community organisation. Working with many groups takes place in community organisation, since in the community there are many groups. For achieving the common goals we have to work with different groups. There are many groups in the community involved in different activities. They are dependent on each other for their functioning. The community organiser works with the different groups in order to achieve the goals of the community. Thus the community organiser takes deliberate efforts to increase the unity among individuals, families, and groups. When they unite together, they collaborate to achieve the common goals. Groups are considered superior in problem solving and action. The groups are better than the average individual but they need not be better than the best individual. While working with groups there is a possibility of getting variety of opinions and information for community organisation. The group members can eliminate the unwanted opinions by group decisions. The individuals can work fast in a group but to involve others in work takes some time. Consensus is considered an ideal way to select from among alternatives while working with groups when most of the group members commit themselves for the cause it is bound to succeed. When there are controversial issues among the group members, it is possible to reach a decision by modifying the original decision. Then it may become acceptable.
to all the group members. Thus, a community organiser has to work with individuals and groups to achieve the community goals. The organiser should have casework and group work skills apart from community organisation skills to work with individuals and groups in the community.

**Concept and Dimensions of Power**

Power means the ability to influence others through community organisation. That is influencing community members to act as suggested by the leaders to achieve the community goals. The community power aspects can be studied. This is called power structure of the community. The power structure of the community varies from community to community.

According to social workers, power is the ability to influence the beliefs and behaviour of others. In other words, power is the ability to make things happen. Floyd hunter explained the nature of power and power structure. Power appears in numerous forms and in a variety of combinations. Power flows from many sources. The money, votes, laws, information, expertise, prestige, group support, contacts, charisma, communication channels, media, social role, access to rewards, position, titles, ideas, verbal skill, ability to gratify important needs, monopoly of essential resources, alliances, energy, conviction, courage, interpersonal skills, moral convictions, etc. are some of the sources of power. The accumulation of power in a specific area is called as a power centre. Power is also distributed. It is not confined within the power centre. It is present at every level of the society. The powerless people also have power only, they have to discover their power. Power may be ascribed by formal delegation or by title. Power may be achieved by many ways. For example, through competence, ability, or by personality etc. power can be achieved. Generally some groups of people
are at the top of the community. They are called power centers at the top of the power pyramid. They influence the community through formal and informal connections. They influence through subordinate leaders who do not participate in community decision-making process. The rich people are mostly powerful. In some communities multiplicity of power structure is noticed. Power structure is also flexible in nature. The community organiser has to study the following: ‘How do some people influence the action of others? Who wields the power? How? What are the issues? What are the results? These aspects are to be analyzed by the organiser for effective practice of community organisation. This is called community power structure analysis. It is called power because some people are capable of action in spite of the resistance of others. Some people are powerful because they knew each other personally and they interact frequently making it possible for them to join in the joint efforts in community affairs. People with power, make major community decision whereas others are active mainly in implementing such decisions. An organiser who is able to study the power structure well can practice community organisation effectively. For example, the village traditional leader is a powerful person. The leader can influence other people to act. Many times this leader is motivated in achieving the goals of the community. The leader is capable of influencing people effectively. When there is opposition from a few men, it can be tackled by the leader because the leader has power.

In the community power is distributed. Each power centre tries to expand its influence over the distribution of resources and rewards. The various power centers enter into an alliance. They share power, enter into a contract and discharge obligations. Power does not come to the passive, timid, defeated persons. Energetic, courageous persons wield it. The people with power tend to join together based on issues.
The basis for alliance are ideological, personality similarities, needs, or to achieve the goals. Power possessed is always used. It can be used for achieving the goals. The power can be intellectual, political, social, or psychological. To retain power there is need for self-awareness and self control. The decision-making is the source and out come of the power. Some times there is a possibility of many power centres. Each power centre may be autonomous. The organiser needs knowledge, and ability to mobilize the power in the community for achieving the goals of the community.

There are techniques for mobilization of power.

a) Appealing to the persons with power, who are related, with, requested help for achieving the goal.

b) Relating the power centres directly to the goal.

c) Developing interdependence among power centres for fulfilling the goals.

d) Formation of new groups by including members of power centres to achieve the goals.

e) Encouraging members of power centres to join with other members of power centres to achieve the goal.

f) By using group work methods, new larger power centres can be strengthened to achieve the goals.

Saul Alinsky and Richard Cloward used the changing of power centres. (1960). The power centre change is achieved by institutional changes. Saul Alinsky gave importance for grass-root approach. In grass-root approach lower level people should get deciding power. Power and authority are connected. Authority is the legitimatization of power. These details are used in community organisation to achieve people’s participation and successful achievement of the goal.
The Relevance of Power in Community Organisation

Development is influenced by power structures of the community. People who are influential can mobilize a major segment of the community. For example; in fund raising drive some people can move behind other people and institutions. There are two models of community power structure. The stratification model and the pluralist mode are the two models of power structures. Stratification model suggests that social class principally determines the distribution of community power. According to this model the power structure in community is composed of stable upper class elite whose interest and outlook on community affairs are relatively homogeneous. According to pluralist model, it rejects the idea that a small homogeneous group dominates community decision-making. But there are numerous small special interest groups that cut across class lines, which are represented in the community decision-making. These are interest groups with overlapping memberships, widely differing power bases, have influences on decisions. Community decisions are the result of the interactions of these different interest groups. This theoretical orientation can help the community organiser in his action. The organiser has to identify the members of the power structure for community organisation. Floyd Hunter an executive director of a community welfare council wrote classic volumes on community power structure. His method of locating community elites is known as the reputation approach. The basic procedure is to ask a group of informants who are knowledgeable about the community to list the people they believe to be most influential in the community affairs. There may be variations in this procedure with regard to how informants are selected, and how questions are put in. By tallying those people most frequently named
as influential leaders we can identify the core of the community power structure. Position approach is another method of locating the members of the power structure based on the assumption of stratification model. This approach assumes that people holding the highest office in the community are at the top of the power structure. By scanning the executive lists of the important social political and economic organisations in the community, one can quickly compile a list of members of the power structure. This approach requires fewer efforts than the reputation approach. Community power is directly related with Community Organisation. Participation of people is related with power. In Community Organisation community power holders are involved to induce people’s participation in order to achieve the organisations objectives. Some times if the existing power centers are not for Community Organisational objectives, then a new center of power is created to get people’s commitment and mass participation. The organiser needs to study power structure and Community Organisation process is carried out successfully through leaders. For example, people are organised to implement family planning. For this the leader is motivated for people’s participation. In some villages the leader opposes family planning. In this situation the community organiser has to identify a new powerful leader to implement family planning. Otherwise it is not possible to implement family planning in the village.

**Barriers to Empowerment**

Generally poor people have the feeling of powerlessness. These people can be helped to feel powerful to decide their own affairs using community organisation. When they learn to solve their problems they feel powerful. They can develop confidence and capacity building takes place so that they feel that they can solve
their problems by themselves. In community organisation, the people carry out decision-making. This provides them with a sense of empowerment. Empowerment deals with providing disadvantaged groups with a powerful instrument for articulating their demands and preferences by developing awareness and decision-making capacity so as to achieve their goal with freedom. Community Organisation results in empowerment of the people. But there are some hindrances like fatalism, illiteracy, superstitions, and caste divisions etc. Sometimes vested interest groups may be a hindrance or barriers for empowerment. The Community dependence, long time effect of poverty, and wrong beliefs etc., act as barriers to empowerment. When people are organised, they get the power. There are leaders in the community and if they are united, they can work together, and they can coordinate with each other. This makes them feel powerful. Thus community organisation results in empowerment of people. The empowerment helps the community to stand against exploitation, gain ability to solve problems, and to achieve the desired goals. Many of the economic problems can be easily solved by community organisation and empowerment of community.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have discussed about community organisation as a macro method of social work and the relevance of community organisation for community development. The differences between community organisation and community development are listed. The importance of working with individuals’ families and groups has been discussed. Toward the end of the chapter, the power structure, and its relevance to community organisation are discussed. All these information will be useful for successful community organisation.


References


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