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ROLE OF COMMUNITY ORGANISER IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS

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Introduction

Community organisation can be practiced in different communities or settings. The community can be classified as rural, urban and tribal on the basis of geographical location. The other classification of the community can be based on the caste, religion, occupation etc. These communities are under different settings where community organisation can be put into practice.

Community organisation is applied when the community takes initiative in solving their problems and meetings their needs. In such a situation the community plays different roles in dealing with the various needs and problems. Usually within the community either the interested people or the people who are affected by an issue take up the lead in addressing the problem. In other words they form the community and undertake different roles in solving the problems and consequently needs get fulfilled. But such a process does not take place easily and hence someone has to take the lead.

When the initiative is not forthcoming from the community an external agent or an outsider or a community organiser steps in and works with the

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community. The community organiser depending on the setting, situation and the problems applies appropriate roles. The roles are likely to vary according to the settings, problems and needs.

Community organisation can be used by the community organiser in different areas or settings like, rural, urban, tribal, institutional, non institutional settings. Whatever may be the settings, depending upon the model of community organisation like locality development, social planning and social action, the community organiser has to apply different roles respectively. Therefore a community organiser has to be familiar with all the roles of community organisation.

**Settings of Community Organisation**

There are different areas where community organisation has scope. The community organiser can practice community organisation in different settings. The settings can be identified based on certain characteristics like location and the nature of administration.

**Geographical Location** Rural, Urban, Tribal

**Sector** Institutional, Non-institutional

Or

Organised, un-organised

**Model** Locality development

Social planning

Social action

The target group with whom the community organiser is going to work with has to be identified and understood. The needs and problems of the community
in different settings will not be the same, and moreover, the characteristics of the people in different settings are likely to vary. Accordingly the methods and techniques of community organisation and the roles of community organiser will have to be used in such a way as to suit the differing settings and characteristics of people.

The organiser can use different methods to identify, assess the need, analyse and understand the situation. There are two levels of understanding, the first level is the understanding of the community by the organiser and the second level is making the community to understand their own situation. Different methods and techniques can be used to understand and make the community to understand. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Appreciative Inquiry can be more useful in this regard. Since these are not within the scope of this unit, it is not discussed here.

Whatever may be the settings there is a community or a group of people with needs and problems. In other words there is a general discontentment which has to be focused and channelised in such a way that the people come together, think together, plan together, implement and evaluate their actions. In all the stages the community has to be fully involved and their capacity increases as a result of access and control over resources and decision making. Therefore in community organisation the community organiser has to play different roles in making the people to be on their own, without any dependency syndrome.

The types of settings may be have limited. But it can be said that wherever there are people living together or where like minded people or the affected individuals come together, they form a community demand their due share from the society.
In different settings depending on the needs and problems and the social situation of the community the roles and strategies have to be changed. Moreover, all the roles need not be applied in all the settings. In order to adopt different roles the community organiser has to be very clear about the process or the steps involved in the practice of community organisation methods and skills and accordingly the roles can be selected and applied.

Rural area is differentiated from the urban, based on the population size, density of population and occupation of the people. If any area the population is more than 5000, the density is more than 300 per square kilometer and more than 75 per cent of the people are engaged in agricultural activities, such areas are called rural area. Along with these characteristics if the geographical location in general is in the hills occupied by tribals it is called the tribal area. In the case of urban area the population is more than 5000, density is more than 300 per square kilometer and more than 75 per cent are involved in non-agricultural activities.

Among the people inter-personal relationship and receptiveness is high and positive in rural and tribal areas, whereas in urban area the primary relationship within the community is rather low. Organising rural and tribal people is less difficult compared to urban people.

In the institutional and non-institutional settings the people are organised and not organised respectively. In an institution due to the organisational structure there is possibility to bring the people together for any common purpose, whereas in the case of non-institutional there is not structured pattern and hence it may be difficult to bring them together.
The three models of community organisation expect different sets of roles. In locality development model the people come together to discuss and decide about the improvement of an area, or locality, emphasizing the broader participation at the local level in goal determination and action.

In the social planning model the people come together and gather pertinent facts about the problems, then decide on a rational and feasible course of action. It is a technical process of solving social problems. Arranging and delivering goods and services to people who need them. External help is more. Interested group members participate. Broader participation is less.

Social action model brings the people to destroy the oppressors. Basic changes in social situations are brought about by organising the affected segment of the population so that they make demands on the larger community for increased resources or better treatment in accordance with social justice and democracy and redistribution of power, resources and decision-making.

The community organiser has to see, observe and understand all the settings and the models before responding or making the people to respond to the situation.

**Steps of Community Organisation**

Community organisation has a series of steps. By following these steps one would be able to apply the different principles, methods and models of community organisation. The steps of community organisation are discussed in the following pages.
People/Community

1) Are they in a difficult situation?
   - Yes
   - No → get out and go to other locality

2) Did they express it?
   - Yes
   - No → make the people to realize it

3) Did they analyse the problem for its magnitude, symptoms and causes?
   - Yes
   - No → enable them to analyse it

4) What is their level of consciousness – magic, naïve and critical?
   - Critical level
   - Magic or naïve level → increase the level of consciousness
   - Naïve level

The above first four stages or steps are the basic steps to make the community to attain the required capacity to identify, analyse and understand the needs and problems of the community. This could be otherwise called as **Assessment of Needs and Problems** of the community. Community organiser has to know about the needs and problems. At the same time he has to enable the people to make an assessment of the needs and problems. In order to do this the community members have to come forward and express their views for further action individually or collectively. In this process the people get empowered by
way of acquiring the skills of analysis and raising the levels of consciousness.

5) **List the problems** – All the identified needs and problems of the community are listed by the community with the help of the community organiser. This is a process which makes the people to understand their own situation. Realization of the needs and problems will bring awareness about their own situation. The involvement of the community in identifying the various needs and problems will increase the participation of the people. The problems in different settings are likely to differ and hence accordingly the identified problems are listed.

6) **Give priorities** – All the needs and problems cannot be considered together for further action. Therefore all the needs and problems are analysed for its severity, magnitude, symptoms and causes based on which they are ordered and priority is given to the needs and problems. The community after having identified the needs and problems, analyze them and give priority and the order in which they have to be taken up for further actions.

7) **Select a problem** – From the priority list most urgent problem which needs to be taken up immediately is selected. All the problems cannot be approached simultaneously therefore there is need for selecting any one problem to initiate further action. Based on the order of priority the first in the list is taken up for working out solutions.

8) **Redefine the problem** – The selected problem is redefined for better understanding by the community. For better planning the problem has to be analysed and defined before taking any further step in addressing the problem. Many times one may look at a phenomenon as a problem
by its appearance or at the peripheral level, instead it has to be further analysed as to what is the real problem. Does it affect the normal functioning of the community? How many people are being affected? How are they affected? If nothing is done towards this how it will disturb the community? These are some of the questions by which we can easily analyse and redefine the problem.

9) **Formulate achievable objective** – The redefined problem is converted into achievable objectives which will be considered for further action. At times the objectives have to be split into many parts so that they could be converted into programmes and activities towards fulfilling the needs and solving problems. Let us assume that illiteracy is a problem in a community. It is further analysed that majority of the people of the locality have not gone to school in their childhood. One of the reasons for that was that there was no school in their locality. At present a school has been constructed and teachers are appointed. Now non availability of the school is not the reason for illiteracy. It is further analysed and found that the children are not sent to the school. Though there were many children in the school-going age, the parents do not send them to the school because the teachers are not regular on the one hand, and on the other, when the teachers are present they do not teach the children. In this situation the general problem externally appears to be illiteracy but its root cause is the defective functioning of the school.

10) **Work out the alternatives** – Based on the objectives the different ways and means are to be found out by the community through brainstorming. One should not be content with a problem with one solution because it will limit the practice of community organisation. In order
to solve the selected problem the community has to generate maximum number of alternatives to address the problem. Let us take the problem of illiteracy as stated in the previous stage. How do we solve the problem? The problem is directly related to the defective functioning of the school. What are the different ways to solve this? The concerned teachers can be met and advised. The defective functioning can be brought to the notice of the higher authorities in different ways. The higher authorities can be met by the representatives with a written representation or various alternatives may be tried. Motivate more children to join the school, withdraw all the children from the school, close the school, organise a protest march, organise a hunger strike, etc. There could be many such alternatives to pin-point attention on the problem and initiate direct action to solve the problems on a long-term basis.

11) **Select an appropriate alternative** – Among the proposed alternatives one of the best alternatives is selected for tackling the selected problem. To solve a problem there could be many ways but there may be one best and suitable way or method by which the problem could be easily solved. Such options should be selected. While selecting an alternative one has to start with softer approach and in a sequence. If the lower level approach fails apply the next one and even that one fails then select the next one and nothing works out finally we may resort to social action methods and may be at times we may have to resort to strong measures.

12) **Work out a plan of action** – In order to realize the selected alternative an action plan is proposed in which the responsibilities are assigned and a tentative organisational structure is prepared.
The time frame, resources needed and personnel involved are decided at this stage. Supposing the illiteracy problem of a community is to be taken up first, it may be decided to meet the authorities and present a petition. This has to be discussed at length in order to decide about the date, time, who, how many, where etc will be the meeting. Also at the time of meeting the authorities who is to speak? What to speak? How to speak etc will have to be decided early and role play and sufficient practice is done in a perfect manner in order to get the desired results.

13) **Mobilization of resources** – To implement the plan of action the required resources are to be assessed, identified and mobilized. The resources may be in terms of time, money, manpower and material. An estimate is made and the sources are identified for mobilization. Many times manpower resources alone may help to arrive at a solution. Therefore the community has to have a thorough understanding of the uses of manpower due to which people by themselves may come forward to offer themselves for further action. Apart from this any other resources have to be mobilized internally and if it is not possible, only then think about getting them from external sources.

14) **Implement the plan of action** – After having made a plan of action along with the resources, the plan is implemented. The implementation takes care of the time and resources towards fulfilling the fixed goals. While implementing the plan of action the involvement of the people and their active participation by accepting the responsibilities has to be ensured. The people have to be prepared and guided to become a partner in the problem solving process.
15) **Evaluate the action** – The implemented plan is evaluated to find out the success and deviation of the action against the objectives. Any shortfall or any undesired results are identified and the reasons for the deviancy are discussed. The positive and desirable results are to be appreciated. The evaluation can be made as an ongoing component of working with the community. It could be organised either at periodical level or at the end of the activity either within the organisation, by the organisational personnel or by an outsider or an expert. The task is not complete unless the evaluation is completed.

16) **Modification** – Based on the evaluation, necessary modifications are decided and introduced. In order to bring about a permanent solution to the selected problem, it is to be tackled affectively with the modifications suggested. These modifications are proposed in order to find a permanently solution to the given problem.

17) **Continuation** – The modified action plan is implemented and continued.

18) **Select the next problem** – Once the selected need is fulfilled the next problem is selected from the priority list.

### Characteristics of A Community Organiser

### Characteristics of a Good Organiser

1) **Curiosity** – The function of an organiser is to raise questions that agitate, and challenge the accepted pattern. He goes forth with the questions and suspects that there are no answers but only further questions.
2) Irreverence – Curiosity and irreverence go together. He is challenging, stimulating, agitating, discrediting. He stirs unrest. In other words he is creating discontentment among the people by highlighting the given situation or making the people to understand the dimensions and possible solution of their social situation.

3) Imagination – To the organiser, imagination is not only a mental faculty but something deeper. It ignites and feeds the force that drives him to organise for change. To realistically appraise and anticipate the probable reactions of the resisting forces, he must be able to identify with them too, in his imagination, and foresee their reactions to his action.

4) A Sense of humour – Humour is essential to successful tactician, for the most potent weapons known to mankind are satire and ridicule. It enables him to maintain his perspective and see himself for what he really is and helps to have friendly relationship with one and all.

5) An organised personality – He should be able to accept and work with irrationalities for the purpose of change. He should recognize that each person or community has a hierarchy of values. He must become sensitive to every thing that is happening around him. He is always learning and every incident teaches him something. He must also accept without fear or worry that the odds are always against him and be prepared to accept both positive and negative reactions.

6) Free and open mind – He must have a flexible personality, not a rigid structure that breaks down when something unexpected happens. The organiser while working with the community does not have any hidden agenda or preconceived ideas.
7) **Discerning and critical eye** – The organiser should be able to look at the situation and differentiate it critically. Any situation has to be viewed through the eyes of the people carefully and find out its magnitude, symptoms and causes.

8) **Receptive ear** – The organiser has to be a good and an attentive listener, listening to the people and to their problem. The organiser while working with the community has to be a person having capacity patient listening, and does not give orders to the people.

The difference between a leader and an organiser is – the leader goes on to build power to fulfill his desires to hold and wield the power for purposes both social and personal. He wants power to himself. The organiser finds his goal in creation of power for others to use.

**Skills of an Effective Community Organiser**

**Problem Analysis** – One of the major tasks of the community organiser is to assist the people in arriving at a solution to the problem. The organiser is capable of identifying the problem and making the people also to identify, analyse, give priorities, select an appropriate priority, mobilize resources, make a plan of action, implement, monitor, evaluate, modify and continue.

**Resource Mobilization** – Any problem of the community while working out the solution requires resources. The resources may be in terms of manpower, money, material and time. On the one hand the organiser is aware of the availability of the resources within the community or outside the community and on the other makes the people to identify the sources of resources and the way to tap such resources.

**Conflict Resolution** – Problems of the community involves the people affected by the problem and the
others who are the causes for the problem. Therefore there could be a conflict between these two groups or between the people and the system. The organiser is equipped with the skill for identifying the conflicting situation and making the people to understand the conflict and then work out the ways and means to find solutions to the conflict.

**Organising Meeting** – Communication within the community and between the community and the organiser is most important. There needs to be transparency in the dealings for which formal and informal meetings have to be organised and information shared. The sharing of information enables sharing of responsibility and decision making.

**Writing Reports** – Documentation of the events for future reference and follow up is absolutely essential. Any communication or any written representation and the report of the dealings have to be recorded. This task is either done by the community organiser or delegated the task to some one else.

**Networking** – In a community while working with the people the participation of the people strengthens or increases the power of the people. At times support from like minded people or organisation has to elicited so that a pressure is built against the oppressive force. This helps to create pressure and increase the bargaining power for which networking with other people and organisations is done by the community organiser.

**Training** – Capacity building of the people and the personnel of an organisation is important while working with the community. In the process of capacity building the community organiser has to be a good trainer. The community organiser has to use his training ability and skills in this regard.
Roles of Community Organiser

Community organiser having the required characteristics and skills and the knowledge about the process and steps of community organisation, will be able to apply the same in different settings by playing appropriate roles. The different roles of a community organiser are discussed here. These roles are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive.

1) Communicator – The community organiser transfers or transmits information, thought, knowledge etc. to the members of the community. Sharing of information enables the community to be better prepared and empowered with information. The communication between the organiser and the community and within the community is essential. The people have to be prepared and informed about the various effects or consequences of the community organisation process. The communication takes place by individual contact, group meetings, group discussions, public meetings etc.

At times the community organiser takes an upper hand and considers that the people are illiterate and ignorant and hence the dealings with the people become a master slave relationship. In order to avoid any such undesired relationship the community organiser has transparency and communicates with the people. The communication enables better interaction which leads to a healthy relationship and cooperation for further action and response.

The community organiser in order to disseminate the information to the people can use different techniques like skit, role plays, street plays and audio and vides shows. The organiser can train the people in all these communicative techniques. It will be more effective if he is able to organise
the small children and train them in this regard. The children are an effective communicative channel and a fast growing channel.

The local groups like women’s group, youth groups are other channels for communication. By giving the responsibility to such groups to communicate to all other members in the community, will also be helpful in reaching out the whole community. There should not be any secrecy or suppression of information which would only create undesired results.

2) **Enabler** – The community organiser facilitates the process in the community for a change. He does not carry out any work by himself but he enables the community to do the work. The organiser gives importance to the process than the product. Therefore the people learn the process rather than get worried about the results or consequences of the process. By the role of enabler the organiser would create independence among the people by which they avoid the dependency syndrome.

The community organiser is present with the people and encourages and gives different suggestions so that the people are able to decide what they would like to do and how they would like to do. The community organiser only initiates the process and people have to follow and at the time of difficulties they refer back to the community organiser. Therefore the role of the community organiser is to make the people to understand the process and fully participate so that they are ready to stand on their own.

3) **Animator** – In any process of community organisation the organiser encourages, provides direction and guidelines to proceed in carrying out different activities. Many people because of
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their culture, tend to depend on others and do not want to decide anything on their own. In such situation the organiser as an animator helps the people to come forward and have active participation. Any further corrections or modifications in the works of the community are being done by the animator. The animator plays a vital role in eliciting the active participation of the people from planning till evaluation, especially ensuring involvement of people in all the dealings of the issues and problems.

The people in general do not want to take any risk and at times they do not even want to do anything for common good. One of the reasons could be that the people have the attitude of culture of poverty or culture of silence. This could be changed by the community organiser by pricking or tickling the conscience of the people through raising questions. This would further enable them increase their level of consciousness.

4) **Guide** – The community organiser instead of doing anything on his own guides the members of the community in the process of community organisation. The community organiser is not a person to shoulder the responsibility or solve problems of the people. Instead he has to make the people to respond for which the organiser provides the various avenues and shows different routes while dealing with the community problems. As a guide, the organiser provides the needed information. He has to be a person with lots of information and ideas. For example in a community there are many educated unemployed youth and their presence in the community is considered more of nuisance than as a human resource. In such a situation the community organiser should be able to provide information about the various employment opportunities, and different
ways to become self-employed, the terms and conditions for availing credit from the credit institutions etc. have to be told to the youth. Once the community organiser is able to provide information which is useful to the people, the youth from the neighbouring areas may also approach in getting some guidance from the community organiser. This would surely fetch credit to the community organiser as well as helps gain the goodwill of the people.

5) **Counsellor** – The community organiser understands the community and enables the community to understand itself. At the time of difficulty the individuals or the groups are given the required counselling to help them proceed in the correct direction. One of the very basic dimensions of counselling is to be a patient listener. Usually every one likes others to listen to them and hesitate to listen to others. Moreover as a counsellor he has to step into the shoes of others, understand and respond. People when they are in trouble, what they need most is that there should be some one to listen to them. When people approach with a problem there should be someone to attend to. In all such situations the community organiser can easily step in as a counsellor for helping the people.

6) **Collaborator** – The community organiser joins hands in performing his task with his colleagues with other like minded people and organisations. The organiser has to have interpersonals relationships and public relations skills. Nowadays organisations approach a problem not with their personal capacity as they also depend upon neighbouring organisation. Similarly other organisations may also look for cooperation and collaboration with different organisations. There are also organisation working towards a similar
problem, wherein a collaborative effort will strengthen both the organisations. Therefore the role of collaborator is very much needed for networking with similar and like minded organisations working for a common cause.

7) **Consultant** – The community organiser enjoys the confidence of the people and advises them in matters of vital interest. The community organiser becomes a person with knowledge and information which is being shared with the people. As a consultant the community organiser makes himself available to the people who are in need, because the community organiser has information and expertise which could be availed of by those who are in need of it. The community organiser instead of working in the field in one area, will be able to contribute his expertise through many individuals and groups by performing the role of a consultant.

8) **Innovator** – The community organiser innovates, performs, and improves upon the techniques, through in the process of community organisation. This gives a lead to the people of the community and enables them to try out new ways and means to find solutions to their needs and problems. The community organisation should not be merely for solving problem. On the other hand it has to function in the areas of capacity building of the individuals and community where the organiser can be an innovator by introducing new ways to improve the capacity of the people. Community organiser is not a person to maintain the system that exists, but he should be a person to introduce new ways and means to climb up the development ladder.

9) **Model** – The community organiser commands perfection as a community organiser and serves as a source of inspiration. The role of the organiser
is to become an example while working with the people. This should further become a model which could be applied in other areas with similar problems. By proper planning in approaching a problem and executing the plan and documenting the whole process will be of great help to others. The problem solving process becomes a model to others.

10) **Motivator** – The community organiser stimulates and sustains active interest among the people for reaching a solution to the needs and problems. The community organiser encourages the community to take up a minor task and complete it successfully which would enable the people to take up more difficult tasks. In such a process the people at times may not take any initiative or content to live with the existing situation. Therefore the organiser motivates the people by making them observe, analyse, understand and respond to the situation. When people are discouraged because they were not able to achieve what they wanted or there is resistance and opposition in such situations the organiser plays the role of a motivator to help them continue efforts in spite of difficulties.

11) **Catalyst** – In the process of community organisation the community organiser retains his identity, at the same time enables the people to be empowered. The people gain accessibility and control over resources and acquire skills in decision making. The community organiser accelerates the actions and reactions so that people are able to achieve the desired results. As a catalyst the organiser is able to increase the response level of the people. The catalyst role further enables the people to become independent and become expert in responding to their own needs.
12) **Advocate** – The role of the advocate is to represent or persuade the members of the community and prepare them to be representatives so as to represent the issues to the concerned authorities to bring about solution to the unmet needs. The advocacy role is an important one in the present context. The needs and problems of the people have to be represented and the required support and networking obtained in order to increase the pressure on the oppressive forces. In the role of advocate the community organiser champions the rights of others. The community organiser speaks on behalf of the community when community is unable to do so, or when community speaks but no one listens. The advocate represents the interests of the community to gain access or services or to improve the quality of services which may be hampered by other forces. An advocate argues, debates, bargains, negotiates, and confronts the evil doers on behalf of the community.

13) **Facilitator** – The community organiser helps the community to articulate their needs, clarify and identify their problems, explore appropriate strategies, select and apply intervention strategies, and develop the people’s capacities to deal with their own problems more effectively. A facilitator provides support, encouragement, and suggestions to the community so that they may proceed more easily and skillfully in completing tasks or solving problem. A facilitator assists the community to find coping strategies, strengths and resources to produce changes necessary for realizing goals and objectives. A facilitator helps client systems to alter their environment.

14) **Mediator** – The community organiser intervenes in disputes between parties to help them find compromises, reconcile differences, or reach
mutually satisfying agreements. The mediator takes a neutral stance between the involved parties. A mediator is involved in resolving disputes between members or between the community and other persons in the broader environment.

15) **Educator** – The community organiser as educator conveys information to the community and those in the broader environment. Organiser provides information necessary for coping with problem situations, assists the community in practicing new behaviour patterns or skills, and teaches through presentation of role models. The community organiser provides information necessary for decision making.

Community organisation is a macro method in social work. The community organiser with the required qualities and skills will be able to work with the people. While working with the people of different background or from different geographical set up the different roles can be applied. All the roles need not be, or cannot be, applied in all the settings or in dealing with all the problems. Moreover there is no one role which is superior or inferior and while dealing with any problem the organiser has to play more than one role. Therefore depending upon the situation and the needs and problems of the community appropriate role has to be applied.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has described the settings in which community organisation can be applied and the skills and characteristics of a community organiser. The community organisation process involves the community in taking the initiative in identifying, analyzing, selecting the different needs and problems of the community. The community also identifies
the needed resources and works out the plan of action, implements, evaluates and continues with the next priority areas. In the process of community organisation the organiser plays different roles like communicator, counsellor, consultant, motivator, innovator, guide, advocate etc. in different settings depending on the situation and needs and problems in the area.

**References**


