Promoting and Sustaining Local Groups in Structural Development

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Abstract: This study is a structural approach to community promotion and sustainability. The study has investigate some of the basic areas of how to understand the needs and demands of local groups. It also analyses some of the areas through which the groups can be promoted and developed. The study adopted a secondary descriptive and analytic approach to arrive at a conclusion. Findings show that the liberalist analytical framework stipulates on freedom and independence of people even at local level. People must be promoted and developed. The federalist structure is also a systemic structure of which failure to promote and develop groups at local level may lead to the collapse of the whole system. The study also concludes that societies can never develop if they continue to allow some gaps and barriers between urban and rural areas. The study also recommends proper commitment in the side of the government in solving the problems of local groups, among other things.

Key words: Local, groups, promotion, sutainance, structures, development, system

INTRODUCTION

From the initial contract signed by the government and the governed since hitherto the era of state of nature, men were to surrender their rights and obey the warrior ones which in return, the weaker ones would get protection of lives and property. The modern day political systems and processes are not exceptional. Politics and democracy have transformed the lives in to having rule of law which envisages justice, equality, freedom, good governance welfare in the process of governance, etc.

Federalism has come to be a system under which a heterogeneous society needs to adopt in order to provide and maintain unity in diversity. The existence of three tiers of governance automatically gets the local areas incorporated in to the administrative system of a federal structure. The major objective of the local council is to bring the local people (who are far away) nearer to the government, to enjoy the provision of social infrastructure, education, capacity building, boost agriculture, etc.

Developed countries have succeeded in transforming the lives of their people at rural level. Countries like China, Brazil, South Africa, Russia and India (the BRICS) are also working toward achieving this goal. Under a local area, there exist divergent groups of people. Some are learners, some are farmers, some are traders and some completely unemployed. They need to be promoted and sustained. Their standard of living needs to be raised and developed.

It is however, against this background that this study tries to delve in to the nature and composition of local groups, how they should be identified, their needs be known and how they should be promoted, sustained and develop.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research work is a result of secondary descriptive research which encompasses the adoption of literatures from library instruments such as books, journals, periodicals, news papers, government reports and others. It is also analytical for the adoption of some theoretical explanations, especially from Eastonian System Theory and the School of Liberalism, to establish a strong fact about the rights of local groups to be promoted and developed. The system theory sees the whole structure as a system whereby local groups are one out of the components of the whole structure which also need to be maintained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Systemic analysis of community promotion: In a federalist structure, the polarization of the state into three tiers, summons the necessity of the existence of the local government as a structure. In the analysis of Easton (1953), the system must persist and it must not collapse no matter what the political trauma. Demands are

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channeled in to the system where by the processing unit has to respond and make a final policy which will later have an outcome and feedback (Fig. 1).

A system may be defined as a set of social, biological, technological or material partners co-operating on a common purpose. System theory is a philosophical doctrine of describing systems as abstract organizations independent of substance, type, time and space. Systems theories are connected to both ontological and epistemological views. The ontological view implies that the world consist of systems or integrative levels. The epistemological view implies a holistic perspective emphasizing the interplay between the systems and their elements in determining their respective functions. It is thus opposed to more atomistic approaches in which objects are investigated as individual phenomena. Systems theory developed especially from biology in which it is difficult to understand the functions of for example, the sexual reproduction of flowers separate from the functions of the insects. The modern understanding in biology is very much that of ecosystems. Systems Theory exists in different versions and is related to some other fields. We can mention General Systems Theory (GST); the systems approach; cybernetics and operational analysis. In recent years, a version of System Theory developed by the German sociologist Luhmann (1976) has been influential.

GST is particularly an approach in philosophy of science, aiming at understanding and investigating the world as sets of systems. Systems approach is the name of a methodology or procedure in which problems are solved from a holistic perspective, not as bundles of small isolated problems which one then tries to combine. One of the most influential versions of Systems Theory has been GST developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1901 to 1972. He wrote:

> This shows the existence of a General Systems Theory which deals with formal characteristics of systems, concrete facts appearing as their special applications by defining variables and parameters. In still other terms, such examples show a formal uniformity of nature
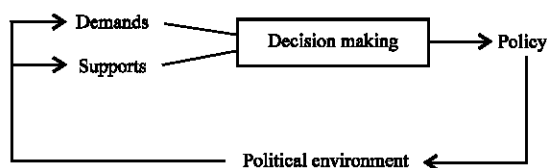

Fig. 1: Easton model of system analysis (Easton (1953); the political system: an inquiry into the state of political science)

Bertalanffy and his followers tried to conceive the world as a whole and represent an attempt to oppose the more atomistic and mechanical approaches in science. The English philosopher Herbert Spencer appears to be the first to set out the general idea of increasing complexity in systems. The term itself (the theory of integrative levels) was first used by the English biochemist (and scholar of Chinese science) Joseph Needham. The idea of integrative levels is widely employed today in comparative psychology, biochemistry, biology, environmental science and many other areas. The Classification Research Group employed it in the UK as a basis for ideas on the development of a new classification scheme in the 1970s but it appears to have dropped out of sight in the field since then. But normatively, Luhmann's methodological anti-humanism blinds the theory from the start to the possible influence of a society-wide and critical public sphere on complex and institutional processes (Ryan and Bohman, 1998).

Liberalistm and local groups' promotion: From the liberalist perspective of promoting and sustaining local groups, it is notable that the starting point is the individual. The need is to find ways of enabling and encouraging each person to fulfill his or her own potential. It is believed that men and women have an immense, largely unrealized capacity for self-direction, self-cultivation, self-understanding and creativity. The ultimate obscenity is to reduce people to the status of objects: to be led, manipulated, directed and discarded.

The major goal, however, transcends political theory: it is an idea of human independence (Joshua and Jon, 2009) in which each, individually precious, human being has the liberty and the opportunity to experiment, to experience, to learn and to influence his or her surroundings. This is the libertarian, rationalist, participative tradition of liberalism.

This kind of liberty is not egotistic individualism. It is not about having one's own way: it is about having a way that is one's own. A society based upon liberty is also based upon responsibility and inter-dependence. It requires a framework which guarantees liberty and supports inter-dependence. It is in community that mutual and individual responsibility operates. It is in interaction with others (Joshua and Jon, 2009) in community with others that the framework is fashioned and the guarantees freely agreed.

A community is a group of individuals with something in common: nationality, neighborhood, religion, research, workplace, victimization, hobbies and mutual interest are a few obvious examples. The members of a community have some interest in common: something

which enables them to identify, one with another. Each person is likely to belong to many different communities, some important, some unimportant, some with a strong sense of identity, some with very little and some whose identity only appears when it is under threat. Some communities are latent; they are only called into existence or rather their existence is only realised when they become necessary or useful.

Classification of local groups: Albeit, the classification of local groups in a common man's perspective and understanding is comprised of: children, parents, farmers, traders, civil servants, teachers, labor group, market women, small and medium business owners, etc. but there is also a professional categorization. According to Wenger (1998), De Laat and Lally (2006) and Archimbaud, we can distinguish four important kinds of communities: community of learning, community of practice, community of interest and community of passion.

Learning community is a group of people who share common values and beliefs and are actively engaged in learning together from each other. Such communities have become the initial template for other types of communities, interdisciplinary approach to higher education. This is based on an advanced kind of educational or pedagogical design. The participants of learning community must feel some sense of loyalty to the group that drive their desire to keep working and helping others, influencing what happened in the community (active and not just reactive). Learning community has enough room to give the chance to the participants to express personal opinions, asking for help or specific information and share stories of events (Wenger, 1998).

A community of interest could be considered as a group of people that share topics that do not really require a formal community but more threaded discussions for collaboration and knowledge sharing. We may also notice loosely connected groups of people and no strong commitment in terms of delivering something together. They stay well aware on the topics and ask questions (De Laat and Lally, 2006). Communities of passion are made of group of people with the richest and most formal set of activities, governance and structure. Members have a particular role (network security advisor), actively help others members to fit and bloom into this role and aim at mastering the discipline. Communities of practice's structure are less formal and are based on common research specialties. Members have a particular role or specialty (such as security) focused on developing expertise and skills in this role or specialty. An important key motivation factor is to learn about the specialty and solve problems. The methodology discussed in this study was drafted from and applied to this type of community.

Identifying the needs of the local groups: The goals of your organization will be set by the interplay between the services and products you are equipped to provide and the needs of the community you serve. Communities come in many different forms and all will have different ways of approaching their goals. Once you have gone through the processes of identifying and understanding your community and identifying its assets and resources, you will need to establish how you can best serve its needs. You may also presume that you know what your community needs. You may even be right. Nevertheless, you must still consult the community first to find out what it wants and you must do this genuinely with a mind open to change.

What the community wants may not always be the same as what it needs but it is possible for one to persuade it that it has needs that the community turned its mind to and if there are large differences between wants and needs you need to know about that too. You may decide to change your direction or you may decide to spend more on community education but you must establish a clear link between your goals and the goals of the people you want to involve.

Finding out what your community says it needs is incredibly important because unless there are common goals, you may be unable to gain committed and motivated volunteers, you may lack clients and you will have little support from funders and stakeholders. There are resource implications to consultation and you may have to balance your ideals with your finances but consulting your community can be done in many ways. Look for a process that will both give you the information you want and move you along the way to finding solutions within your present resources. Questionnaires and surveys can help, focus groups and open-ended investigations are better and best of all is a forum made up of your clients and stakeholders where you can think things through productively as a community.

Survey research: Prior to the active participation of stake holders on community development through a survey, there is need of meeting a few of the influential people who know about the area. Such people may include the heads of community groups, local personalities and officials. They should therefore, be asked to identify: the important issues for the community and what they think are needed. Who else should be consulted and where the information you want is held (Kerlinger, 1986; Meredith, 1998). If time is very limited and the issues are really clear or if you can not afford the resources to go further, this may be all you need to do as you will probably have already developed a reasonable insight into your

community's needs. If you are able to proceed however, be aware that leaders are not always in close touch with the situation on the ground. Even when they are up-to-date, they may have their own interests to serve and their own barrows to push so their perspectives may not be universal.

It is imperative to look in to what research has already been done with this community or in other similar communities in other places or even a foreign country. What agencies would hold data on this area? Check government records. Do a thorough search on the Internet. Look through the local paper. You don't want to reinvent the wheel.

Surveys: If there is no existing research done about your area, you may want to carry out a survey of your own (Forza and Di Nuzzo, 1998). You are not doing an academic research project, you just want a guide to action, so do not fret too much about statistical accuracy. A survey-handed out at a street stall, posted out (if you have a good mailing list), delivered in local mailboxes or inserted in your magazine-can give you an idea of how people feel about the issues that concern you. Give a copy to anyone who shows an interest.

Survey design will depend on your aims. If you want to establish that there is community support for a particular position you will go about it differently than if you are simply seeking a feel for the priorities of members of the community.

Focus groups: In dealing with focus groups (Debus, 1990), it is ideal to select people from your membership base, potential members and other stakeholders around a table and take them through the options for your present and future work; you will throw a real light on your operations and your priorities. Start with a list of issues and have a facilitator in the room to stop people wandering too far from the list (unless they're doing it particularly brilliantly). One may even ask the following questions:

- What are your main concerns?
- What groups in particular have these problems?
- Do you know where to find any previous data on these issues in this area?

Groups that have no resource limitations-sometimes keep holding focus groups until no new insights come up and you've heard everything before but you're unlikely to be that well-funded or to have that much time. Go forward when you're so well provided with new ideas that you have all you can handle.

Community forums: If you want support from the community you're addressing it's important that the community feels an ownership of the process which they feel they've been genuinely consulted and that their views have been heeded. Try and get your stakeholders and your partners together to thrash out what's needed who should do it and how you should research together. The experience and expertise that you can accumulate in a room full of administrators, members and advocates can be very effective in identifying needs and remedies.

On the other hand, this is a lot of work. If you're contemplating taking this on, look around for partners people with a common interest in some part of the field. What resources can they contribute? Use the process to build relationships and to build trust. Again, you will probably want to tape these discussions.

Review: When you have all the information gathered, line up the expressed needs and research out your priorities.

Prevalence: It is the need widespread?

Severity: It is the need serious or only a minor inconvenience?

Selectivity: It is expressed most by a particular segment of the community?

Possible interventions: Some needs are going to be very real but out of your reach; you will have to pick out the needs that your organization is capable of addressing.

Other basic steps in community promotion and sustainability: The basic steps attached to the promotion and sustenance of local groups involves several crossings, starting from dream up to monitor. Those steps could be organized into 5 main levels: analyze, build, promote, sustain and monitor.

Analyze: The goal of the analyze phase (Wenger, 1998) is to start the process and gather all relevant information to understand what we want to do, where we want to go why and how. As already mentioned, a community could emerge from scratch through the passion of a small group of enthusiastic people but raising the chance of success needs a bit more organization and processes (Fig. 2).

In this phase, you should start by dreaming about: how ideally would your community work? How should it be organized? Who will lead and make things happen? Take a drink and let your imagination flows freely. Identifying topic and sub topics will allow clarification of your ideas as well as easy ideas sharing with your colleagues. At this point, identify your core team is important to know who is committed and willing to actively contribute to the journey. Once the team defined,
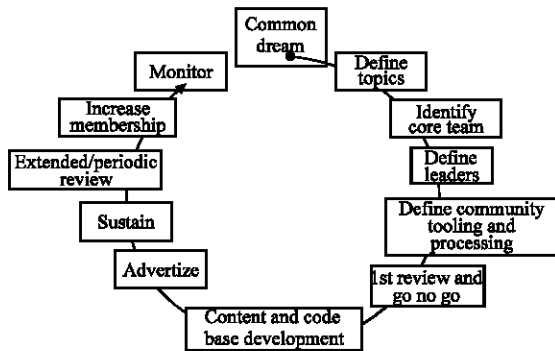
Fig. 2: Analyzing phase

you should address the means; basically how are you doing to work together? The coffee machine spot may become quickly small to handle all your brainstorms session and info exchange. Those community processes will encompass governance, communication, development life cycle, collaborative environment, dissemination and promotion.

Again paper and pencils will need to be replaced by more sophisticated tools (preferably open source) to allow better and more efficient team work. Identify (and use) community tools to organize your collaboration, your structured content and facilitate your dissemination activities (promotion and awareness). Those tools centered on a forge will enable daily operation and communication, being a central repository of the community and the project. The methodology caters for a set of tools to help during this step.

Throughout this process we should refine a better idea of what you intend to build and achieve. It could be wise to stop at some point in time and have a look around to look for any existing communities or projects sharing the same concern and topics. Joining those initiatives or starting from scratch is a taught decision and involve two different road maps. At the end of the analysis phase, a go no go decision should be made based on all the collected information and the planned roadmap. Criteria for that decision will be detailed in a future study.

No go decision will need to be explained carefully to identify what are the main show stoppers given the current context and to avoid asking again the same questions later when passion will come back on the table. A go decision is even more difficult because the time and effort spent so far are much smaller than what will be required to really launch and build the community. Strong commitment and a clear understanding to the roadmap and effort ahead are compulsory and must be shared by all the core team members. Providing you selected the from scratch option, you jump now in the second main phase:

Build: This phase is where you put bricks and mortals together. You start coding, create documentation (user guide, API development guide, use case, etc.), setup your portal (mission statement, license used, development status, how to install the software, download section, screenshots, etc.), release packages, publish project tasks and roadmap, manage volunteers and external contributions (Fogel, 2005). Your daily activities will be driven by the community governance, intellectual property policy, project life cycle and communication rules (simple and flexible).

Promote: You have a team in place, a code base; documentation and a portal where people can find all needed information to either contribute or use your code. Basically, something to show! Your community is established so you should advertise it: submit articles to newsletter that meet your audience, use mailing list and send broadcast messages, use your own network around you and ask your members to spread the words. You can publish news in (local and international) newspapers and webzines. You may also use social networks that are today widely spread (LinkedIn) to publicize about your community. Once your community is up and running and has reached a certain level of recognition, you may enter the last phase.

Sustain: You need to keep the momentum and as a consequence, community leader (s) should have devoted time and leadership to animate and stimulate the community (Gouvea and Motta, 2006). We recommend to hold periodic events (project summit, general assembly), hold periodic phone conferences and publish minutes notes regularly, be active on forums and sometimes even copy interesting topics coming from external sources into your news and forums. We recommend you to stay transparent in any decision you make as well as listening to people (Muller, 2006).

You also need to reach a critical mass of members (Sama and Shoaf, 2007) that will leverage your daily operation (system administration, bug trackers, bug fixers, webmaster, project manager and translators) thus you also need to increase the numbers of people in your community: propose initiatives (coding contest, code camp, project summit, etc.), use virtual social networking, show your community values on your portal, explain how people can participate and become a member, offer incentive to join. Don't hesitate to cross boundaries and collect good ideas from other communities (online video-gaming communities).

Two other factors are very important for external user to contribute actively in a community: recognition (Gouvea and Motta, 2006) and knowledge sharing. Why

don't you propose to show who is the latest registered user onto your home page? Who are the top bug fixers? Next, you should devote resource (s) to organize the knowledge within the community; propose knowledge sharing facilities (webinars, workshop, use case, etc.). As in the analysis phase, you may also have a look around and search for any existing communities or projects that may be interested by using your code base or that you may interested to co-operate with. Identify those communities, approach their leaders and propose collaboration.

Monitor: In order to assess progress and trend and validate results of your actions, researchers recommend defining your own monitoring process rather than using predefined templates: identify the goal (why and what would you like to measure?), define the metrics, collect data (analyze), identify problems and trends, define accordingly the actions to address both of them, execute the actions and re-assess the project health.

It is however, advisable you monitor the growth of your community but also the health of your project through metrics such as number of bugs tracked, number of downloads, number of visits, number of post in forums, email exchanges, number of events organized, etc. Finally, bear in mind that you should also monitor the community at large (Latemann and Stieglitz, 1997).

Epitome of local group promotion and sustainability
The colonial legacy: The notion of community development owes a great deal to the efforts of colonial administrators. After the Second World War the British Colonial Office became concerned with community development. Mayo (1975) suggests that administrators concocted the term out of their attempts to develop basic education and social welfare in the UK colonies. For example, a 1944 report, Mass education in the colonies, placed an emphasis on literacy training and advocated the promotion of agriculture, health and other social services through local self help (Midgley *et al.*, 1986). This was a set of concerns similar to those surrounding the interest in rural development and educational extension in North America in the first two decades of the century. Community development was defined in one UK government publication as:

> Active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community but if this initiative is not forthcoming spontaneously by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to achieve its active and enthusiastic response to the movement (Colonial Office, 1958)

The concern with community development was in part, a response to the growth of nationalism and in part an outcome of a desire to increase the rate of industrial and economic development. The notion began to feature strongly in United Nations documents during the 1950s and these drew extensively on the British literature and experiences in Africa and India (Midgley *et al.*, 1986). Three important elements were identified:

- A concern with social and economic development
- The fostering and capacity of local co-operation and self-help
- The use of expertise and methods drawn from outside the local community

Structural development-capacity building: Some of the classic concerns of community development found expression in the early 1990s in the notion of capacity building. There was an interest in developing the ability of local groups and networks to function and to contribute to social and economic development. On the whole though, the idea of capacity building often remained associated with a technicist and economistic viewpoint a concern with competencies, investing and so on. There were those that looked to the bottom-up and more convivial aspects of traditional community development. A few contributions also emerged that had a more thorough theoretical basis. Eade (1997) approach for example and that of development agencies such as Oxfam was linked into certain fundamental beliefs for example: that all people have the right to an equitable share in the world's resources and to be the researchers of their own development and that the denial of such rights is at the heart of poverty and suffering. Strengthening people's capacity to determine their values and priorities and to act on these is the basis of development:

> Capacity building is an approach to development rather than a set of discrete or pre-packaged interventions. So while there are certain basic capacities (social, economic, political and practical) on which development depends, Oxfam seeks to support organizations working for sustainable social justice (Eade, 1997)

From this flow a number of implications. That:

- Capacity building must not be seen in isolation
- All have capacities that may not be obvious to outsiders and it may take time to discover these
- If it is to be inclusive, interventions must take into account different and sometimes negative, ways in which the impacts will be experienced

- Flexibility is important but this must not be at the expense of a loss of direction with regard to wider processes of social and economic transformation
- Capacity building is not doing development on the cheap or against the clock. Nor is it risk-free (Eade, 1997)

The problem was that many of those interested in capacity building located it within a particular paradigm. It was capacity-building within a particular set of policy parameters. There was not often a disposition to build capacity that might oppose or fail to the importance of state interests and priorities (Eade, 1997).

Community education: Broadly, we can approach community education as education for community within community. In other words, something called community is not just the place or context in which education is to occur; fostering community is also a central concern. The process of becoming part of an existing social network in order to encourage dialogue and learning is sometimes labeled as informal education in UK discussions or as community education in Scottish debates. For example, CeVe (Scotland) have defined community education as:

A process designed to enrich the lives of individuals and groups by engaging with people living within a geographical area or sharing a common interest to develop voluntarily a range of learning, action and reflection opportunities, determined by their personal, social, economic and political needs (Mayo, 1997)

CONCLUSION

It is universally apparent that societies can never be considered as developed until they remove the greater barrier that exists between the rural and urban centers. The lives of the local groups need to be improved and sustained; local structures promoted and developed. The federalist polarization of the state would only be fruitful when this expectation is fulfilled of promoting live at local or communal level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to have effective promotion and sustenance of local groups, the following suggestions are useful:

- Political commitment: the political or public office holders must be committed toward promoting the lives of the local groups. Without the spirit of commitment such effort can not be realized

- Political clamor: the local groups should also yearn for the promotion of their political, economic and social live within their own social locality. By so doing, the government can not listen to them. Some times you have to appeal or send a signal as a reminder
- Knowing the specific needs of the people is indispensable by the government, so as to know the basic areas of need. In this respect, survey research needs to be conducted periodically for better understanding of the problems of local groups
- The process of promotion and sustenance must be monitored. This goes to the area of fund raising and disbursement in financing development projects of the local people. Without effective monitoring and evaluation, all development projects of the people may face policy miscarriage
- Severe punishment is applied to people thwarting the government efforts toward local group's development and sustainability. This may emanate from corrupt tendencies in the process of building a particular community or local groups of a local area

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