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Unit 4

Social action as a method of social work

Core course-CC8-Social Work with Communities
1. Learning Objective
2. Introduction
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1. Learning Objective:

After studying this Unit, the learners will

- Understand the social action as a method of social work
- Understand how Social Action utilize other social work methods in the process of attaining its goal of community empowerment

2.Introduction:

Social problems and conflicts have remained an integral part of the society from the time immemorial. For providing relief and solution to these problems, social work and social welfare have also remained a part of human society. Professional social work utilizes certain methods of working with people, in view of empowering the people to solve their problems. Among the methods of social work, social action is a new introduction in the professional social work practice. Though its relevance is often felt in the field situations, social workers do not practice this method quite frequently. The inherent theme behind social action is re-adjustment of the social institutions and redistribution of power and resources for social justice and empowerment of the community. As a method of social work, social action mobilizes the general population to bring about structural changes in the social system. Also the relation of social action with other methods of social work is very important to understand. Social action process heavily rests on other social work methods like group work and community organisation. In fact social action comes into the picture when people's needs and problems remain unmet and unsettled through other methods of social work. Social action seems to be a step forward to community organisation.

Group work and casework are the foundation to social action where people are mobilized to confront authorities. Social welfare administration gives the ground to social workers to prepare the community for social action. Social workers make use of the skills and experiences gained through other methods of social work in the process of social action.

3. Social action as a method of social work:

Every profession has a tested body of knowledge, which includes principles, techniques, methods, procedures, tools and terminology of its own. The same is true with professional social work. Social work has six methods of working with people (casework, group work, community organisation, social action, social welfare administration and social work research). These methods are the techniques of enabling the people for better social functioning. Social action, as a method of professional social work practice, is an organised effort to change or improve social and economic institutions through organisation and mobilization of the community people. Unlike other social work methods, social action emphasizes on long-term essential changes in established social institutions. Social action covers movements of social, religious and political reform, social legislation, racial and social justice, human rights, freedom and civic liberty. Previously social action was considered as a tool within the field of community organisation, but now it has been considered as a separate technique of social work and as such a fourth process (see Siddiqui, 1984).

Why social action is considered a method of professional social work? A method of professional social work is a technique or approach having characteristics like: an established process with easily recognizable stages, based on the philosophy of social work, having principles or guidelines or theories, skills of working with people which are learned and refined through professional guidance. Let us view social action within these parameters.

Social action process, more or less, passes through the recognizable and systematic stages. First of all, a scientific analysis or research on the social problem affecting the community people is carried out. Then, awareness is generated regarding various aspects of the

problem and people are encouraged to take collective and collaborative action to solve the problem. Third stage is centred on organising people for coordinated and directed intervention whereas in further stage suitable strategies are developed to achieve the goals and lastly, action is taken. Every social action process passes through these stages and professional social workers or actionists are well-equipped with knowledge and skills required in different stages.

As a method of social work, social action adheres to the philosophy of professional social work. It does not blame people for the deficiency or problem. It strongly believes in the worth and dignity of human beings. Social action rejects the doctrine of laissezfaire and survival of the fittest. The unfit person has the same fundamental rights as do the more fit, and the rich or powerful is not necessarily fit, and nor a poor or weak is indeed unfit. It adopts a commitment to the capacity of all the people to take action to improve their life circumstances. It grounds this action on a process of open participation in which people, preferably collectively, explore the underlying social issues of their life situations as the foundation for action. Practitioners do not lead, but, through a non-elitist highly skilled process, they facilitate members in making choices and taking action for themselves.

Like any other method of professional social work, social action does have certain principles, details of which are given in the previous unit. Very briefly, these principles are mentioned here. Firstly, the community people must have the faith and confidence in the social worker (principle of credibility building). The social actionist or social worker should make the people believe that their actions to achieve the set goals are legitimate (principle of legitimization). Certain strategies adopted like dharna, morcha, slogans, emotional

powerful speeches, rallies create dramatic effects in social action (principle of dramatization). Social action does not depend on a single strategy, rather it adopts many different ways and means to achieve the goal (principle of multiple strategies). Social action must not rest only on conflictual activities with authorities. It should also concentrate on constructive developmental activities along with confrontation (principle of dual approach). Social action does not confine itself to a single aspect of the social issue. Rather, it emphasizes on programmes having multi-prong aspects like social, economic, cultural, etc. (principle of manifold programmes). Social workers or actionists, during social action, make use of these principles for achieving the overall goal of social justice.

Social action has a definite set of goals and objectives. The goal of social action is redistribution with regard to resources and power to provide social justice to all. Its objective is the proper shaping and development of socio-cultural environment in which a richer and fuller life may be possible for all the citizens.

Social action is a method of social work, which is, used for/with/by any unit of society larger than sociologically defined community. It is an organised effort to change or improve social and economic institutions, as distinguished from other methods of social work, which do not characteristically cover essential changes in established institutions through confrontation with the authorities. It may be described as organised group effort to solve mass problems or to further socially desirable objectives by attempting to influence or change basic social and economic conditions or practices. It always involves public pressure in one form or the other. However, it does not approve of physical coercion or violence. Another aim of social action, which has been mentioned by many social work scholars, is

formulation of or change in existing social legislation. Once the legislation comes into force, its implementation at the ground level is another salient task of social actionists or social workers. Thus we see that social action, as a method of social work profession, is a powerful tool of bringing about positive changes in the social system for the betterment of the masses.

Social Action in Relation to Case Work

Social Action does utilize other social work methods in the process of attaining its goal of community empowerment. In fact, we see that the whole process of social action is the amalgamation of various methods of social work. In this section of the unit, we would try to understand the relation of other methods of social work with that of social action.

Let us first pay attention to social casework. As we already know that social casework is a method of social work to help individuals to cope more effectively with their social problems. The psychosocial problem(s) of the client are dealt mainly in one-to-one relationship between the client and the caseworker. The relation of social action with casework can be understood with the fact that individuals and society are interdependent. Most of the problems, which affect an individual, have connections with or repercussions to his/her inter-personal relations. These inter-personal relations could be within the family and/or with various institutions in the community, say, educational institutions, work place, legal, neighbourhood, friends, etc. So, casework process may involve interventions not only at the family level but also at the institutions in the larger community. The client may be having the same social problem, which the social worker is addressing, at the macro level through social action. In such

a situation, caseworker needs to build confidence and faith among the client and prepare him/her to be a part of social action process.

Social Action in Relation to Group Work

The importance of social group work can be understood with the fact that a man is considered a group animal. Group experiences are the essential needs of human beings. A human turns from a biological being to a social being through group life. Attention may now be paid to social group work, which is a method through which individuals develop the ability of establishing constructive relationships with each other through group activities.

Social group work acts as a building block in the process of social action. Group members learn organisation, cooperation and coordination. They learn interdependence and democratic values. In the group work process, while participating in the activities of the group, the group members learn to live and work together to attain some specific goals. Social group work solves adjustment problems and enhances positive interpersonal relations. It prepares the individuals to learn and share responsibility in working together. All these factors contribute to the success of social action taken up for a social cause influencing a large segment of the population

Social Action in Relation to Community Organisation

Social action shares many similarities with community organisation. Sometimes there is a debate whether social action is a part of community

organisation or is completely a different entity. Some believe that it is a part of community organisation.

Social Action in Relation to Social Welfare Administration

Before looking into the relation between social action and social welfare administration, let us first take a brief look at social welfare administration as a method of social work. It is the process by which we apply professional approach to certain goals and transform social policy into social action. It is a process of planning, implementing, directing, monitoring, organising, coordinating and evaluation of services rendered for the welfare and development of the people. Social welfare administration is mainly concerned with providing social welfare services like activities related to child care, women's development, etc., in an organisational set-up and thus translating the social mandates into operational policies. The organisation delivering these social services does have a definite set of goals, staffing pattern and adequate administrative and managerial skills.

Social Action in Relation to Social Work Research

Social work research is the systematic and scientific study of social problems, and its objective is to produce knowledge that can be used in planning and carrying out social work programmes and (if the need arises) social action. Social work research is a very powerful tool in social action. It helps in 'knowing' the social problem, its intensity and extensiveness, its causal factors, its impact on the target population and its repercussions on social life of the people. It also gives the understanding of the factual ground realities (and not mere perceptions) of the social situations, which in turn helps in conceptualizing the pros and cons of various possible social interventions. So, a systematic study

of a social problem, and looking for remedies through social work intervention, is a must for the attainment of goals through social action.

4. Summary:

Social action is a method of professional social work aimed at solving social problems through redistribution of power and resources. Its objective is to achieve social justice and empowerment of the community. Social action mobilizes the general population to bring about structural changes in the social system. Social action is weighed through certain parameters to establish that it is a method of professional social work. It has a recognized process with easily identifiable stages. It rests on the philosophy that every individual is worthy and has the capacity to improve his life conditions. Like any other method of professional social work, social action does have certain principles and social workers or actionists, during social action, make use of these principles for achieving the overall goal of social justice. Social action does have a definite set of goals of providing social justice to all. It employs certain strategies and tactics like negotiation, persuasion, competition, disruption, collaboration, bargain, strikes, boycotts to attain its objectives, which makes it different from other social work methods. However, it rejects violence and blood-shedding. Social workers practicing social action are well versed with certain skills that are developed through teaching-learning and training.

Social action depends upon other methods of social work during its process. The role of social action is visible when people's problems remain unsolved through other methods of social work. Social casework and group work can be taken as the base to social action where people are mobilized to confront authorities. Social action is considered to be a step forward to community organisation. Social work research helps in identifying objective and developing critical perception of the social

problem. Social welfare administration provides the ground to social workers to prepare the community for social action. Social workers utilize skills of other methods of social work in the process of social action.