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Programme- Master in social work

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UNIT 1

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION: PRINCIPLES AND ASSUMPTIONS

Core course-CC8-Social Work with community
Learning Objective
Introduction
Principles and assumptions of Community Organization

Learning Objective

The principles that are involved in community organization

Assumptions regarding community organization as a method

Introduction:

The principles of community organisation can be understood as generalized guiding rules. They also refer to a "rule of right action" or "a value judgment as to what is sound or good community organisation". It follows, therefore, that

principles are usually expressions of value judgments. Moreover, principles are shaped and limited by the frame of reference of community organisation, and in harmony with the nature and spirit of social work in a democratic society. This implies that we become concerned with the dignity and worth of individuals, their freedom, choice of options and right to self determination, security, participation, all of which could lead to a more wholesome and abundant life for them. It also implies that these principles are in alignment with such general principles of democracy, such as self-reliance, cooperation, partnership, transparency and sustainability. These principles are also shaped by an understanding of the social forces which impinge on the individuals and the groups comprising the community, as also the planning process, and some knowledge of the empirical work in groups and communities (Ross, 1955).

Dunham (1958) has suggested a statement of 28 suggested principles of community organisation which he grouped under seven headings. These are:

   i.   Democracy and social welfare
  ii.   Community roots for community programs
 iii.   Citizen understanding, support, and participation and professional service
  iv.   Cooperation
   v.   Social welfare programs
  vi.   Adequacy, distribution, and organisation of social welfare services
 vii.   Prevention.

The principles of community organisation given by Dunham appear more as the "directive principles of state policy" rather than the principles of community work whose conditions are different for a community worker operating in India or other developing countries. As can also be observed from the headings, Dunham visualized an ideal type of social service network which appear as a broad-based set of guidelines for ideal conditions, rather than specific principles of community organisation.

Ross (1967) presented specific principles, which have been discussed in terms of the nature of the organisation or association and the role of the professional worker.

The principles identified by Ross are

1. Discontent with existing conditions in the community must initiate and/or nourish the development of the association

This implies that some deep and widely shared feelings of discontent with some aspect/s of community life will be a more effective springboard for the creation and development of the organisation/association. Only if there is a profound conviction about community problem(s), and "a deep feeling that the prevailing community situation is wrong and must be righted", does the group get common motivation to cooperatively overcome and resolve the problem. For example, organisations such as the Red Cross develop a picture of universal need which relates to the sense of discontent felt by the communities, where continuous programs with support from the need felt followers constitute into a strong association.

2. Discontent must be focused and channeled into organisation, planning and action in respect to specific problems

Discontent per se is of doubtful value. In fact, unfocussed discontent is often a major block to any purposeful action, because it then translates into a situation of chronic dissatisfaction. Only when discontent is focused and ordered that it becomes a suitable and healthy motive for action. Discontent should therefore be specific and focused in terms of specific achievable goals.

3. **The discontent which initiates or sustains community organisation must be widely shared in the community**

Community organisation, according to Ross, is not a minority movement. It cannot be initiated solely by reason of needs or discontents which appeal to only a very small group in the community. The discontent must, therefore, be recognized by the major parts of the community, so that they all may be motivated to do something about it.

It is essential, therefore, that the discontent focuses on those problems about which there is, or can be, unanimous agreement, so that they can provide a common framework for cooperative work by the community. If such widespread agreement is not always possible, efforts to "spread the area of shared concern" need to be necessarily made.

4. **The association must involve leaders (both formal and informal) identified with, and accepted by, major subgroups in the community**

Community organisation requires the participation of people of the community. However, everyone in the community cannot always be involved in face to face contact with all other members of the community, especially if the size of the community is large. Therefore, some means must be evolved for participation through representation. This is made possible by first identifying all major groupings of people in the community and subsequently, identifying the leaders (both formal and informal) of these groups. These groups can be brought into dialogue with each other around some frequent problem/s through the accepted group leaders. These leaders know their people and in turn, are known by their people. They can therefore act as effective communication links between the diverse groups.

5. The association must have goals and methods of procedure of high acceptability

The association brings together different groupings of people, each having their specific interests, attitudes and behaviour. The task of integrating these groups into a unified association which can work on a cooperative basis is a difficult one. If the association is to sustain, it requires a statement of general goals and methods of procedure accepted by the people. These will constitute the common frame of reference, which in periods of disagreement and conflict can be referred to as a means of finding direction and emphasizing the common purpose for which the association exists.

6. The programme of the association should include some activities with emotional content

To bind together the diverse groupings of people comprised in the community and to develop cohesion, common ideas, feelings, traditions, celebrations and festivities play an important role. These contribute to the building of the community sentiment which is so important for community integration. Rituals which symbolize the values for which the association stands are valuable because they reinforce loyalty to those goals and unify the group around these goals.

7. The association should seek to utilize the manifest and latent goodwill which exists in the community

According to Ross, there are extensive sources of goodwill and support in the community which can be mobilized in cooperative community initiatives. They may be in the form of people who may be willing to contribute and participate in any constructive community effort; other professionals who may be keen to associate with the community practitioners; or leaders who may represent groupings of people who could be associated with the community endeavor.

8. **The association must develop active and effective lines of communication both within the association and between the association and the community**

Communication, which is undoubtedly the essence of community life, is a process by which the area of mutual understanding and shared values is widened in the community. Such a process does not often emerge/ develop easily. To begin with, effective communication within a group or between groups depends on the quality of relationships between the people. Therefore, the essential task in the association devoted to community organisation is the development of an atmosphere in which participants feel safe and are able to express themselves freely. Secondly, the way in which communication is structured also becomes important. Communication is likely to be more effective in situations where leadership functions are shared, and where informal and intimate discussion of problems is undertaken.

9. **The association should seek to support and strengthen the groups which it brings together in cooperative work**

The association, which seeks to be an organisation of the community, is made up of community groups. If these groups are disorganised or apathetic, the association is likely to have a narrow base of participation and support. Therefore, if the association is to emerge as a strong one, the groups composing it must be strong and cohesive units. There needs to be consistent efforts to help the constituent groups to achieve cohesion and capacity to function cooperatively, as also independently.

10. **The association should be flexible in its organisational procedures without disrupting its regular decision-making routines**

Acceptance and establishment of rules and methods of procedure lead to a sense of security in the operation of the association. Flexibility in the association does not imply any disruption of these established procedures. What this means is the opportunity to use a variety of methods in undertaking the proceedings of the association. The use of studies, visits, appointment of committees, camps etc. may

be considered for acquiring data and generating consensus, without interfering with the decision-making responsibilities of the group assigned to do so.

11. The association should develop a proper pace for its work and relate it to the existing conditions in the community

First, the association must obtain a proper pace for its own work. This develops as members learn to work together, when procedures are established and responsibilities are accepted. Establishment of objectives with agreed upon time schedules help to bring about a pace of work in the association to which all gradually adjust. Further, the pace at which a community will involve itself in a community initiative is very important. Based on the attitudes and capacity of the people making the change, some time is certainly required to adjust to the change. Establishing a pace that is consistent with that of the community and comfortable for it, therefore, becomes imperative.

12. The association should seek to develop effective leaders

Development of those leaders, who will facilitate the community organisation process, helps the association to be productive. This will also contribute to the development of morale, both in the association and the community, which is an important requirement. It is more realistic to accept that, instead of one central figure, there are many persons contributing to the leadership of a group. For example, there may be a "popular leader" and a "task leader". Both may be desirable. While the latter may keep the group engaged in its work, the former may help to maintain and restore group unity and keep members happy. The customs and expectations of the group may determine how many, and what kind of leadership functions the central figure should assume.

13. The association must develop strength, stability, and prestige in the community

Community organisation seeks to increase cooperation among community groups, as they deal with community projects. The successful achievements of the association can facilitate this. The association must have strength, both in terms of the involvement of accepted group leaders and its ability, to work through difficult community problems. Only such an association will win the participation and support of the people and become a symbol of community

Assumptions Regarding Community organization Method

According to Ross, community organization derives from a unique frame of reference, which assumes a distinct form due to a particular value orientation which stems from traditional religious values which have been expanded to form the basis of social work philosophy; a particular conception of the problems confronting modern man in the community and certain assumptions that influence the method (Ross, 1955). While we have covered the first component in the previous section, and we will cover the second component in another unit, let us look at the assumptions that influence the method of community organization, which derive in part from

the value orientation of, and in part from experiences in social work. Some of these are as follows:

a. Communities of people can develop capacity to deal with their own problems.

This implies that the community people may confront situations in which they feel disenchanted and hopeless, but they can nevertheless develop attitudes and skills

which permit them to work towards shaping their community appropriately to meet their needs.

b. People want change and can change.

This implies that communities of people constantly change their ways of life and are interested in making their lives better. The will to change is often paralysed by challenging social forces, but if blocks to free thinking and feeling are removed, all people will participate in changes which aim to meet their needs more adequately.

c. People should participate in making, adjusting, or controlling the major changes taking place in their communities.

This assumption implies that people should have the opportunity to organize to achieve their own common goals, plan the adjustments which must be made in response to certain changes which are beyond their control, and to regulate their own communities as far as possible.

d. Changes in community living which are selfimposed or self-developed have a meaning and permanence that imposed changes do not have

In the community, people as they strive towards achievement of their goals, modify and develop capacities consistent with these goals. In the process the culture as a whole adjusts to the changes that are taking place. Changes such as these are self imposed and determined last longer than those that are externally imposed, because in the latter situation, the community does not feel any sense of participation or conscious planning for adjustment to such changes.

e. A "holistic approach" can deal successfully with problems with which a "fragmented approach" cannot cope.

This implies that social problems can be dealt with by adopting more coordinated approaches rather than piecemeal initiatives by the separate social agencies working apart from each other. Most of the problems have multiple causation and a single specialized approach to the problem will have limited value.

f. Democracy requires cooperative participation and action in the affairs. Of the community, and that people must learn the skills which make this possible.

There must be active participation in the development and use of an effective communication process, which facilitates the identification of common objectives and implementation of collective action. People may require practice and the help of experts to establish and maintain democratic community institutions.

g. Frequently, communities of people need help in organizing to deal with their needs

This help may be of diverse types, ranging from advice, to resources/inputs, or programme designing etc.While people may possess their own resources and capacities, they may often require professional help in mobilizing them effectively.

The aforementioned assumptions condition the nature of community organization, the methods used by the community organizer in the field and the principles applicable in the process.

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