



Contiguous community development



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ABSTRACT

There are two sides to community development: development IN a community and development OF community. To get community members organically involved in community change, these two sides need to complement each other. We propose that one way of doing so is through facilitating what we have termed contiguous community development. This involves community members learning from each other through descriptive, explanatory, and praxis dialogues utilizing their social networks of ties and communities of practice. This practice of community development enables a community to address its problems and needs (development IN the community) and to enhance community members' relationships, togetherness, enthusiasm, and self-worth (development OF community). Subsistent and substantive communities, which have significant gemeinschaft relationships and allocentric behavior, provide a favorable social environment for contiguous community development. We draw on case stories from Pamoza International and Utooni Development Organizations in Malawi and Kenya respectively to explain the contiguous community development practice. We find that successful contiguous community development involves four main factors. The first is exposure to new ideas, reflection on those ideas, then engaging in action. The second is people acquiring or developing and retaining, into their conscious, values including the desire to learn from each other, understanding a problem and the need to address it, hard work, and visioning what a better community would look like. The third is organic organizational growth that is responsive to what people are learning and doing. The fourth is the integration of development IN a community and development OF community.

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1. Introduction

About 75% of poor people in the world live in rural areas, which “frequently suffer from inadequate enterprise creation, poor infrastructure, inadequate financial services, and insufficient provision of social protection” (Boto et al., 2011: 4). Understandably and rightly so, much community development activity, evidenced by activities of non-governmental and non-profit organizations especially in developing countries, is directed at rural areas. Most of this development has been sectoral; it has focused on addressing sectors such as agriculture, education, and health. International discourse over the inadequacies of the sectoral approach to rural transformation has led to the New Rural Paradigm, which aims at shifting the focus “from supporting sectors to a holistic approach that tries to identify how the various components of a rural

economy interact” (Boto et al., 2011 p. 11). In both the conventional and the New Rural Paradigm frame of thinking, community development has mainly concerned itself with the provision of services to rural communities.

This provision of services has mostly been undertaken directly in that community development practitioners “believe in encouraging people to think and decide for themselves, but in practice spend a great deal of time trying to get them [the people] to accept and act on what the development practitioners have already decided for them” (Batten, 1974: 4). This directive approach to community development is technocratic; it treats community members as “objects to be acted upon” rather than “subjects of their own transformation dealing with their local problems” (Westoby and Dowling, 2013: 53). It is also hegemonic in that it does not enable community members to make sense of the world and reflexively act on it in order to transform or change it (Mayo, 1999; Ledwith, 2006). Further, it focuses its attention on addressing problems and needs rather than building on the strengths and assets or capitals that a community can draw upon to transform

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itself (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; Flora and Flora, 2012).

Drawing on the vast literature, community development can be defined and practiced in various ways. For example, Ledwith (2006) focuses on addressing structures of power in her critical approach to community development. Thus community development engages people in critical consciousness or conscientization aimed at addressing structures of oppression. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) advance an asset-based approach to community development instead of the deficits-focused or needs-based type. Westoby and Dowling (2013) focus on the role of dialogue to effect social change. These different viewpoints on community development are more or less captured by Matarrita-Casante and Brennan (2012:6) who define community development as “a process that entails organization, facilitation, and action, which allows people to establish ways to create the community they want to live in ... a process that provides vision, planning, direction, and coordinated action towards desired goals [outcomes] associated with the promotion of efforts aimed at improving the conditions in which local resources operate.” Community development is not just about outcomes such as providing desired services but also about the process in attaining the desired outcomes. Cavaye (2001) affirms this. He argues that the provision of services, and he would agree that these must not be done directly and technocratically, is one side of community development. The second comprises the “processes of engagement and partnership that help local people” to organically get involved in community change activities that build enthusiasm, creativity, and confidence (Cavaye, 2001:110–111).

These two sides to community development have also been termed development IN the community and development OF community. Development IN the community pertains to the economic and such other activities undertaken in the community that provide the services community members need while development OF community pertains to improving the quality of relationships, confidence, enthusiasm, and participation of community members in the community development process, which lead to cohesive and integrative structures in the community (Shaffer and Summers, 1989). These two sides of community development need to complement each other to get community members organically involved in their community's development. We argue in this paper that what we have termed contiguous community development is one way, though not the only, for the two sides to complement each other.

In the next section, we build a case for contiguous community development starting with an explanation of how social relationships exist as networks of ties and how these networks of ties are foundational to contiguous community development. We then move onto describing how the networks of ties factor into communities of practice, the mutuality in thinking, acting, and accounting (Wenger, 1998). Thereafter, we describe the case stories in Malawi and Kenya to provide some evidence of how social networks of ties and communities of practice factor into the practice of contiguous community development. We explain this contiguous community development practice, delineate four main factors that enhance its success, and, in our conclusion, highlight its relevance to rural community development especially in developing societies.

2. The case for contiguous community development

A central feature of contiguous community development is engaging people in meeting their needs while at the same time enhancing their creativity and building their relationships. This is done through facilitating learning and praxis: people learning from one another through exchange of ideas promulgated by the social networks of ties between people across time (generation to generation) and across space (within an area and from area to area)

then reflexively acting to meet their needs or address their problems. Contiguous community development builds on the learning and action attained through exchange of ideas propagated through social networks of ties. This process could start with one group or in a particular part of a community then contiguously reach out to other groups or expand to other parts of a community and other communities based on the reach of people's social networks of ties.

2.1. Social networks of ties and contiguity

Social networks of ties have been found to be important channels in the transfer of knowledge, information, ideas, skills, values, and practices (Castells, 1996, 2000; Gilchrist, 2009). According to Gilchrist, networks “foster mutual learning and shared commitments so that people can work and live together ...”; networks are “... an invaluable resource, functioning as communication systems and organisational mechanisms” (2009: 21, 41). These ties can boost social capital, the value (trust, reciprocity, good nature, helping behavior, etc.) in the ties that lead people in these networks to do things for each other or to come to one another's help (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2001). This is because social networks of ties provide a mechanism for or a locale where exchange of material as well as non-material goods and services takes place. The exchange is rooted in the patterns of relationships and interactions between people in any given social setting (Cook and Whitmeyer, 1992). A community then can be understood as comprising people in relationships structured around social networks of ties that legislate exchange of ideas and modes of action within and beyond the geographic boundaries of a community.

We draw on Ferdinand Tönnies' insight on social relationships and their place in community dynamics in linking social networks of ties to contiguous community development. Tönnies (1957 [1887]) observed that all social relationships are created by and through human will, defined as the biddings involved in the mental action of thinking that feed into behavior or action. According to Tönnies, relationships can preserve, shape and reshape, or destroy people's wills. There are some relationships that bring about wills that affirm mutuality. Such relationships represent “unity in plurality” (Tönnies, 1957[1887] p. 33). Tönnies termed this unity in plurality social life *gemeinschaft* or community. Here, human relationships are intimate and communal; they are real and organic, rooted in associations of mutual benefit, and bound in prosperity and hardship. Tönnies contrasts *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* relationships found in urban/modern societies. These *gesellschaft* relationships are formal, more impersonal, devoid of generally held or binding norms, detached from traditional and sentimental concerns, and often follow more rational processes in decision-making.

This paper pertains to subsistent and substantive societies (characteristic of rural communities in Malawi and Kenya). They are subsistent in that community members mostly meet their material and nonmaterial needs through exploiting their natural resources and physical labor; they are substantive in that economic activities are driven by non-market-based reciprocity, redistribution, and exchange rather than market-driven, rational-choice decision-making processes that are responsive to price mechanisms (Polanyi, 2001; Mtika, 2015). In such societies, *gemeinschaft* relationships are pervasive. So we have restricted ourselves to such societies in our discussion of contiguous community development. We do, however, realize that there is change in these societies towards more *gesellschaft* and the resultant idiocentric (self-centered) behavior (Mtika, 2015).

Tönnies argues that the human will driving behavior in *gemeinschaft* relationships is natural. It derives from temperament, character, and intellectual attitude originating from the natural

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