

ABSTRACT

CURRENT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Community development has been institutionalized in the Department of Social Development through the White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997. The White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997 provides the overall framework and the instruments needed for the transformation of welfare services in South Africa towards a developmental welfare system that facilitates the development of human capacity and self-reliance within a caring and enabling socio-economic environment. Community development is an integral part of the developmental welfare system and has been adopted as an approach, philosophy, process, method and strategy to address basic material, physical and psycho-social needs of the poor and vulnerable communities. The White Paper made provision for employment of a range of social development workers to address different needs and problems and to increase human resource capacity, particularly in under-serviced communities and rural areas.

Community development has faced a variety challenges and obstacles, some within its own practice and others in the external environment. By its nature, community development is cross-cutting and implementation is often challenged by a plethora of policies and programmes that are not coherent and integrated. The non-existence of an overall Community Development Policy to guide implementation of community development work and a Strategy to link efforts across sectors, agencies and the full range of policies issues also impacts on service delivery. Community development is facilitated by practitioners and workers in the public and non-governmental sectors mainly community based organizations, most of whom are not adequately and uniformly trained as the curriculum offered by institutions of higher learning is not standardized. This accounts for the lack of a consistent, concrete and rounded definition of what community development and its outcomes are as well as the adoption of different approaches. Community development is also not as yet recognized as neither an occupation nor a profession. This is as a result of the non-existence of an occupation framework that defines community development, its scope of practice and standards to ensure an understanding of community development values by practitioners and workers and reflected in their work. The lack of recognition of community development as an occupation has not only impacted on the status of the practice but also the persons and organizations involved, their morale and service delivery.

This paper will therefore focus on the current status of community development in South Africa in relation to ensuring a shared understanding of community development; the need for strategic coordination across the sector and alignment at national, provincial and local levels; training, support and development of practitioners and community based organizations for the occupation; recognition of community development as an occupation and processes towards professionalization. The paper will conclude raising pertinent questions for the sector which would lead towards the outlining of critical steps that must be taken to raise the profile of community development and improve its effectiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa's key community development challenge is to overcome the legacy of many years of colonialism, segregation and apartheid which was characterized mainly by the racially disaggregated settlement patterns and distribution of resources. As a result, this country is still battling to reduce inequalities, poverty and unemployment despite the positive economic growth experienced between 1994 and 2010 before the recession that hit the world. The Constitution of South Africa, in particular Chapter 2 which is the Bill of Rights, clearly articulates community development as a human right. Therefore, as part of its Constitutional mandate, the national government, in partnership with the provincial and local governments have a responsibility to ensure that all communities, as bonafide citizens of the Republic of South Africa enjoy human development and improvement of the quality of life from the cradle to the grave.

In response to this mandate, pro-poor policies and programmes such as the RDP, GEAR, ASGISA, White Paper for Social Welfare and Local Government, ISRDP and URP, EPWP, War-on-Poverty and CRDP have been developed to guide community development in the country. These policies and programmes clearly articulates at least four community development perspectives which have been adopted by the democratic government of South Africa in its effort to improve the lives of its citizens, which are the income, basic needs, social exclusion and the sustainable livelihoods perspectives.¹

The **income perspective** is founded on the logic of income poverty, which clearly undermines the significance of non-income poverty. This perspective influenced the country's approaches to community development and poverty alleviation which were operationalized through, amongst other policy instruments, GEAR, ASGISA, EPWP, Social Assistance and income generation and job creation poverty relief projects. The **basic needs perspective** concerns itself with assistance to the poor by promoting and supporting their access to sanitation, security, clean water, shelter, education, appropriate clothing, health and such other necessities. This perspective has been operationalized to some extent through programmes such as the RDP, the ISRDP/URP, the IDPs as well as the War-on-Poverty campaign. The **social exclusion perspective** seeks

¹ See Ismail Davids (2005)

to reduce deprivation, vulnerability and inequality which continue to plague this country and its citizens. The key policy instrument guiding this perspective is the Bill of Rights which is enshrined in the Republic of South Africa's Constitution (Act 108 of 1996). The **sustainable livelihoods perspective** stresses the requirement for ordinary people and communities to be assisted, through the construction and strengthening of an appropriate "asset base" that enables them to pro-actively identify, define and practice particular strategies for coping with their conditions of poverty, vulnerability and hardships.

The challenge for South Africa has been the capacity to consolidate these perspectives into a comprehensive community development approach that is inclusive, integrated and coherent.

2. INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997 is a negotiated policy framework and strategy, which charted a new path for social welfare in the promotion of national social development. The goal of developmental social welfare is a humane, peaceful, just and caring society which upholds welfare rights, facilitate the meeting of basic human needs, release people's creative energies, and help them to achieve their aspirations, build human capacity and self-reliance, and participate fully in all spheres of social, economic and political life². The White Paper clearly articulates community development as an approach, philosophy, process, method and strategy to address basic material, physical and psycho-social needs of the poor and vulnerable communities. It also makes provision for the employment of a range of social development workers to address different needs and problems and to increase human resource capacity, particularly in under-serviced communities and rural areas.

It is through this White Paper that community development has been institutionalized in the Department of Social Development and that gave this department a mandate to provide sector-wide leadership.

² White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997

3. THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN DSD

The practice of community development is done by community development practitioners, workers and community based organizations. According to the White Paper for Social Welfare, their focus of community development should be on the following:

- The facilitation of the community development process.
- The development of family-centred and community-based programmes.
- The facilitation of capacity-building and economic empowerment programmes.
- The promotion of developmental social relief and disaster relief programmes.
- The facilitation of food aid programmes in emergency situations as a temporary measure until individuals and households can be incorporated into other social development programmes.
- Encouraging and facilitating voluntary participation in social and community programmes
- Facilitation of self-help groups and mutual aid support programmes where needed.
- Promotion of advocacy programmes.

However, due to the pressing challenges of poverty, inequalities and unemployment, the focus of the DSD's community development programmes have been on projects, mainly income generating, food security and social relief projects. Although the income/economic perspective dominated, the approaches adopted were not empowering as almost all projects were state-led and funded and therefore operated as non-profit organizations. As a result, most of these projects could not survive without continued state-funding thus failed to achieve the intended purpose of reducing poverty and unemployment. This perspective undermined the fact that community development is not just about growth but also the capability of communities to make choices, to increase their networks and to manage change. Community development was also perceived to be a tool for service delivery to meet the needs of the poor and vulnerable. While access to services has been improved, the need-based and service delivery approach to community development did not empower communities to 're-

think' issues, improve their networks and their overall capacity to mobilize existing skills and put innovative ideas into action. These approaches reinforced dependency on state support and eroded the self-help attitude that once existed in communities.

4. CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community development in South Africa has faced a variety challenges and obstacles, some within its own practice and others in the external environment. These challenges include lack of a shared understanding of community development; poor coordination across the sector and alignment at national, provincial and local levels; incoherent training, support and development of practitioners and community based organizations for the occupation; lack of recognition of community development as an occupation and complex processes towards professionalization.

4.1. Attributes of the Occupation

Failure to implement all key community development focus areas outlined in the White Paper, in particular, facilitation of the community development process and adoption of developmental and empowering approaches did not only create wrong assumptions about the meaning and scope of community development but also impacted on appropriate resourcing of the community development programme and skilling of practitioners and community based organizations. The scope of community development practice i.e. the nature of work undertaken in this field has not been very clear in DSD. This lack of clarity has impacted on the definition and the status of the community development occupation. The other critical challenge has been the lack of evidence base. Working with patchy documentation of outcomes and undefined indicators has contributed to low levels of understanding and status of community development.

While it is clear that community development happens when a community itself engages in a process aimed at improving its social, economic, cultural, political and environmental situation, what is happening in practice is not aligned to this understanding of community development. What happens in practice is the setting up of a number of uncoordinated projects and initiatives most of which are not sustainable

thus impacting negatively on the current standing of community development. The question has always been how we can ensure that community development is widely understood and used to maximum effect to build vibrant and sustainable communities.

4.2. Recognition of Community Development as an Occupation

Community Development is an emerging discipline that is not as yet fully recognized either as an occupation or as profession. In order for community development to attain full recognition, it requires an occupation framework that clearly outlines its scope of practice, norms and standards and code of ethics as well as a recognized qualification as well as a recognized qualification at NQF Level 8 that is registered with the SAQA.

The Occupation Framework and the Qualification must then be submitted to the Department of Higher Education and Training where they will be compared with those of other related occupations. The outcome of this assessment will determine the successful recognition of Community Development as an Occupation. These processes are critical as they are prerequisites for the registration of Community Development as a profession with the South African Council for Social Service Professions.

4.3. Resourcing Community Development

Funding of community development in DSD is the lowest of all the department's programmes. This is also due to the limited scope of community development as well as the limited capacity of community based organizations to implement programmes and delivery effective community development services. There are many CBOs that are engaged in voluntary or self-help work often with very weak institutional support and poor access to funds to carry out their work. The department must adopt an approach which combines capacity building and organizational development with funding advice to increase the potential of CBOs to become more self-managing and sustainable, able to deliver positive community development outcomes. CBOs operating at this level could be able to partner with DSD and improve funding of the community development sector.

4.4. Training, support and development of Practitioners and CBOs

The lack of understanding of what community development in DSD has to do, and the limited focus on projects and food distribution resulted in the recruitment and appointment of many practitioners/workers who were not appropriately trained and qualified in community development. These officials required a lot of support and participation in skills development programmes to improve their knowledge and understanding of community development theories for effective service delivery. The challenge for the sector has been the non-availability of standardized community development qualifications marked by the training and development of practitioners in what may be called community development, with some similarities here and there, but lacking in terms of relevance to the South African context and in the essential values and depth of the subject matter.

Another aspect of training and development in this field is the importance of networking and on-the-job training. Without proper support and systems to facilitate effective networking and learning, practitioners and CBOs will not be able to improve their skills and knowledge. There is lack of organized support for practitioners and community based organizations to ensure that they practice in an environment and that they have a platform to collectively 'voice' their issues and bargain.

4.5. Strategic coordination and alignment across the sector

By its nature, community development is cross-cutting and its implementation is often challenged by a plethora of policies and programmes that are not coherent and integrated. The Department of Social Development is in the process of finalizing the National Community Development Policy Framework which aims to guide implementation of community development and to link efforts across sectors including civil society and development agencies. Currently, community development efforts are still implemented in a fragmented and uncoordinated manner with poor alignment between national, provincial and the local spheres of government. This fragmented approach contributes to wastage of limited resources as the impact in communities does not equate the vast resources invested.

It is important to build as strategic local approach as collaboration at a local level is the means to make significant impact on the people's lives and conditions. Establishing a coordinated approach to local community development should be part of the Sustainable Community Strategy integrated with the IDPs.

5. CURRENT STATUS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

5.1. Role and Status of the Community Development Occupation

The Department of Social Development has started a process to promote community development as a nationally recognized occupation with clear values, methods and outcomes. For this process to be achieved, two important steps must be undertaken:

5.1.1. Development of a standardized qualification at NQF Level 8

The department and SAQA entered into a Joint Implementation Plan to develop standardized qualifications for community development. Through this arrangement, three qualifications were developed and registered which include a 4 year Bachelor of Community Development Degree (NQF Level 8). This qualification has been informed by the scope of practice for Community Development Practitioners. It is a professional qualification intended for CDPs who are required to facilitate collective processes in a community to effect psycho, social and economic development. CDPs require theoretical knowledge and practical skills to facilitate activities that enable households and communities to manage their own development to achieve sustainable livelihoods. CDPs need to be accountable, responsible and ethical. This qualification is being consulted with Institutions of Higher Learning that offer community development to adopt it as a standardized national qualification.

5.1.2. Development of an Occupation Framework

The process of developing the Occupation Framework for Community Development has started. The Occupational Framework describes what a person needs to do, to know and understand in their job in order to carry out their role in a consistent and competent

way.³ It outlines the standards for the occupation and also informs 'good practice' by creating linkages between skills, knowledge and values. The standards outlined in the Occupational Framework ensures that the values of community development be understood and reflected in the work of community development practitioners as facilitators of activities throughout the community development process. The OFCD will therefore, provide a cornerstone and guiding framework for all community development practice across a wide range of roles, settings, levels of responsibility as well as for present and future challenges.⁴

5.2. Training, education and development

In 2008, the Department and SAQA entered into a Joint Implementation Plan to generate and register qualifications and unit standards for community development practitioners. The aim of this process was promote standardisation and formalisation of community development profession which has been a major milestone for the mandate of the department. Three qualifications have been generated and registered i.e. FETC NQF L4; National Diploma Certificate NQF L5 and 4 Year Community Development Degree NQF L8. The process has ensured:

- consistency and uniformity in the implementation of unit standards,
- linkage of community development professional needs to specialised qualifications;
- compliance of community development qualifications with relevant legislation and regulations; and ultimately
- Commencement of the process towards professionalization of community development.

In 2009, the department commissioned a skills audit of all community development practitioners to assess the existing capacity, which includes qualifications, skills and talent with a view to design training programs for the personnel. The Audit also evaluated the CDPs capacity to undertake major community development programs as well as to integrate their activities with other departmental programs through the

³ National Occupational Standards for Community Development, Lifelong Learning, UK

⁴ National Occupational Standards for Community Development, Lifelong Learning, UK

referral system. Fundamental to the Skills Audit was the desire to create a community development system that consists of knowledgeable and well-trained community development cadres.

The findings of the skills audit revealed different issues relating to the status of skills for practitioners and managers throughout the nine provinces. Amongst other issues, lack of uniformity across the nine provinces in terms of implementing community development, qualifications for CDPs, salary grading of CDPs, training, norms and standards and policy guidelines that shape community development were prominent. These findings have assisted in creating an understanding of the nature of community development practice capacity that is in place and what is required and should be done to strengthen and improve the capabilities of practitioners and managers to function optimally. A skills plan has been developed and in the process of implementation to address the gaps identified.

5.3. Professionalization of Community Development

The first consultative workshop held in 2007 discussed and developed consensus regarding the need for professionalization of community development. The fundamental question posed in the second consultative meeting then was whether the registration of persons involved in community development with the South African Council for Social Service Professions would be relevant and beneficial for community development.

Community development stakeholders appreciated that professionalization will have a positive impact on community development. However, this process is complex and long with distinct steps that must be achieved before its completion. Some of these steps have been achieved such as the generation of a recognized qualification at NQF Level 8 and the Occupation Framework. Other steps include the establishment of an association, followed by a professional board and ultimately a Council.

6. WHERE TO FROM HERE

A lot has been done and achieved towards professionalization of community development. What we need as community development activists, is to organize ourselves in a manner that will assist us to map a route to create an effective, valued, strategic, recognized and sustainable community development sector. This is a call towards the establishment of a Community Development Association.

6.1. The purpose of the Association

The purpose of the Association will be to establish and promote Community Development as a unique and distinct multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral human centred profession and facilitate processes towards the establishment of a statutory professional board and a national council for Community Development in democratic South Africa.

6.2. The primary objective

The Primary objective is to promote community development networking to be used amongst others as a way of:

- Improving access to and sharing of information to unify the sector;
- Enabling better understanding, promotion and influence of the core community development values;
- Facilitating development of community development infrastructure and support;
- Acting as a policy-practice-development loop;
- Maximizing funding streams to better support community development work;
- Promoting grass-roots training to contribute to the building of enhanced skills and expertise of CBOs empowering them to challenge, participate in and facilitate change in local communities.

6.3. The Role of the Association will amongst others be to:

- Bring together practitioners and activists of community development to foster recognition of the profession
- Represent the interest of community development practitioners

- Contribute to and influence national policies on Community Development
- Promote good community development practice based on sound community development principles
- Protect the public against community development malpractice by its members
- Provide strategic direction towards professionalization of community development
- Explore innovative ideas in CD practice, encourage and exercise creativity and achieve results.
- Contribute to the development of knowledge, theory and practice in community development
- Promote scholarship on Community Development in a South African context
- Challenge assumptions that may negatively impact on Community Development in South Africa.

7. Conclusion

This summit is intended to create awareness within the sector about progress made and areas that still need to be shaped to remove challenges and obstacles that impact on community development. Let us work and act together in unison in order to realize our dream to promote recognition of community development as a unique and distinct occupation and profession.

'All our dreams can come true - if we have the courage to pursue them'. (Walt Disney)