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Introduction

Community engagement is a very popular and prominent approach to social problems in many societies, and it has been researched extensively due to this prominence. In spite of the growing body of research on different aspects of Community Engagement (CE), little empirical evidence are available on CE in social research.

This chapter focuses on community engagement in social research. At the end of the chapter, students are expected to attain a comprehensive understanding of this topic and be able to design effective strategies for community engagement. Students should also be able to identify the various components of community engagement, and be equipped with the ability to recommend ways of overcoming the problems of this approach. Lastly, students should be familiar with the relationship between community engagement and action research.

The World Health Organization (WHO 1992) defines Community Engagement (CE) as “a process that enables people to become actively and genuinely involved in defining issues of concern to them, making decisions about factors affecting their lives in addition to formulating and implementing policies, planning, developing and delivering services as well as taking action to enhance desired change”. Similarly, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (1997) described community engagement as the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of people. It may also be defined as “the process of engaging communities to identify community priorities, resources, needs and solutions in such a way as to promote representative participation, good governance, accountability and peaceful change” (Mercy Corps, USA 2016). Tamarack Institute Canada (2007) defines Community Engagement as a method to improve communities by identifying and addressing local ideas, concerns and opportunities. Community Engagement is defined as the simultaneous and multifaceted engagement of supported and adequately resourced communities and relevant agencies around an issue or a set of issues in order to raise awareness, assess and articulate resources needed to achieve sustained and equitable provisions of appropriate service (University of Lancashire, Department of Health Community Engagement Project UK). Besides the previously mentioned goals of addressing some kinds of social

problems, these definitions also suggest political connotations in the sense that they ensure participation by fostering “strong relationships between local governments, businesses and community members.” These views further suggest cooperation among members of the community and the relevant stakeholders for purposes of social change. Community engagement encompasses a wide variety of activities ranging from information sharing to community empowerment.

Before discussing the goals of this approach to social change and solutions, we turn attention to the two main concepts, namely, community and engagement. A community is defined as a set of people living together with a common interest bound by territory and shared resources such as language, culture, religion and occupation (Gender and Transformative Leadership – A contextualized Curriculum for Nigeria). The concept of community refers to “a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage”; or a social group of any size having its members reside within a specific locality or geographical location with a common system of governance, cultural and historical heritage (Bartle 2007); or “a locality inhabited by a group of people sharing common viewpoints, ideologies, characteristics or interest that make them distinct and unique from the larger society within which it exists.” For Bezzina (1998), the sense of community implies interaction, identity, mutuality and shared values.

Many renowned sociologists, for example, Ferdinand Toennies and Talcott Parsons, among many others, have characterized the concept of community. Talcott Parsons—who was noted for his ideas on “patterned variables”—describes a community as “a collectivity, the members of which share a common territorial area as their base of operation for daily activities” (Bartle 2007). On his part, Toennies, a German sociologist, distinguished between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* to represent the rural and urban groups respectively. In his framework, *gemeinschaft*, which was the rural, was synonymous with community while the *gesellschaft* was synonymous with society. Consequently, he defined the community or *gemeinschaft*, i.e. the rural, as groups that exist because the members share feelings of togetherness and bonds that emanate from shared cultural expectations or practices. The bonds in *gemeinschafts* thrive on what he and his predecessors defined as mechanical solidarity. The *gesellschaft* or society/the urban, thrived on organic solidarity. He defined it as groups who sustained their togetherness because they played instrumental roles in each other’s lives, namely in helping them to maintain their goals, which is significantly different from the rural community’s dependence on shared expectations or culture.

Although Toennies used the German term of *gemeinschaft* to refer to community, in the context of social engagement, community goes beyond

the *gemeinschaft* to include the *gesellschaft*, because one observes the occurrence of community engagement in both rural and urban communities. According to Parson's view, it is simply the collectivity that organizes to ensure participatory governance and as a means of finding solutions to pertinent problems. In the health sector, for instance, communities are engaged to sensitize them to emergencies and the outbreak of epidemics or dangerous communicable diseases. In parts of Africa, both urban and rural communities are engaged from time to time to embark on cleaning and sanitation campaigns. Community Engagement strategies relate to all activities undertaken by the organization or group of persons. It encompasses different varieties of activities including information sharing, respect, equality, social justice, inclusion of diversity, power sharing and responsibility, choice and empowerment etc. For the purpose of this study, three different levels of community engagement are discussed in this section:

Public communication	Sponsor	→	Public representation
Public consultation	Sponsor	←	Public representation
Public perception	Sponsor	→	Public representation

Source: Rave & Trever "A Typology of Public Engagement Mechanism" Science Technology and Human Values (2003): 302.

Goals of Community Engagement

The definitions of the concepts of community, engagement, and community engagement above are illustrative of the many goals of this approach. Yakubu et al. (2018) suggests that the choice of community engagement method should be guided by the goals of the community engagement, the nature of the research project and the target community to be engaged. In this subsection, the various goals of community engagement are outlined. The organizers of the community engagement typically determine these goals. They give significant consideration to the problems as are extant in the targeted communities. They also consider the urgency of the problems, and the resource availability.

The following are the goals of community engagement:

- (i) **Increase community awareness:** This goal calls on researchers to embark on programs using strategies that sensitize community members to problems that affect the community. Members of the community could be encouraged to collectively participate in specific projects to strengthen their societies and improve the quality of life.
- (ii) **Target the community:** The sensitization of members of the community will not be effective if their specific problems are not addressed. Hence, prior to embarking on any community

engagement, researchers should aim at unearthing major problems that affect the communities and make them prominent components of the goals.

- (iii) **Strengthen the community:** As previously mentioned in this chapter, community engagement is commonly geared toward problem solving and thus have the potential of strengthening the community. Engaging members further stimulates grassroots participation and could also improve social integration, which also has the capability of strengthening the group's cohesion.
- (iv) **Problem solving:** Communities are engaged not as an end in themselves, but for the purposes of addressing social problems. There are so many social problems, and these can be targeted in community engagement. In parts of Africa, concerns with social inequalities and discrimination against women have often led to their engagement through the activities of many non-governmental organizations and researchers. The following are some of the problems or issues that may be targeted and addressed in the process of community engagement:
- (a) Poverty eradication,
 - (b) Good governance,
 - (c) Eradication of gender imbalances,
 - (d) Elimination of other forms of social inequalities,
 - (e) Promotion of school enrollment and attendance among children,
 - (f) Prevention of crimes, and
 - (g) Campaign against the abuse of children.
- (v) **Increase community ownership of programs:** Community engagement emphasizes grassroots participation in projects. It is vital to involve community members to prevent instances of project abandonment. Therefore, while community mobilization aims primarily at improvements in the lives of the group, their engagement in the projects ensure that they see themselves as bona fide owners who must protect and maintain them.
- (vi) **Empowering members of the community:** Social problems inhibit social mobility, and social integration and may impact standards of living negatively. The successful engagement of community members, the discovery of major problems affecting their societies, the recommendation of strategies to eliminate such problems, and the implementation of such programs are capable of improving standards of living, and the community ownership of such programs will empower them eventually.

- (vii) **Build on social networks:** The engagement of communities strengthens relationships that may have been established among community members, various communities, and among communities and various governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations. Through such networks, many other projects for purposes of inter and intra community engagement can occur.
- (viii) Other goals of community engagement with regards to the health system identified in the literature include: to improve quality, support progressive partnerships, strengthen accountability and support sustainability.

Elements of Community Engagement

Prior to embarking on any community engagement project, the organizer, researcher, or leader must consider a number of factors to ensure that the projects are feasible and can be accomplished within a specified period. According to Pact Tanzania (n.d.), this may entail the application of technical and systematic approach to examining the communities to identify the following elements:

- (i) **The nature, extent, and seriousness of the problem:** This should also be geared towards an understanding of the scope of the problems to be addressed through mobilization. The organizers need to be mindful of when and how the problem occurs as well as major attributes of the condition. In this regard, they would want to identify the socioeconomic statuses of the people who are generally affected by the problems, and these may include age, gender, level of education, and employment statuses of the targeted population. Additionally, it would be helpful for the organizers to familiarize themselves with the nature or the problem. Here they ascertain whether the problem is an already existing one or a chronic or emerging one.
- (ii) **The causes of the problem:** This element requires the researcher to establish in detail the basic and major causes of the conditions being addressed.
- (iii) **Resources and programs that are available both internally and externally:** This knowledge would strengthen any collaboration between the community members and other agencies that may be endowed with some resources and could be working on the targeted problems and similar ones, and would thus be in a position to collaborate effectively.

These elements should inform or form major components of the strategies discussed in the next subsection on cycle of community engagement and action research. The discovery stage, which comprises research and sensitization of the community could integrate the enquiries into the elements of community engagement.

Cycle of Community Engagement and Social Research

The steps in community engagement are perceived to be cyclical because it is a never-ending process. These steps may be located in some applied sociological methods particularly the qualitative research methodology of action research. Social research is collaborative and entails the simultaneous processes of conducting studies and implementing its findings to solve social problems that the study discovers. Social research may commence at either of two different stages, namely either to (a) start with research that will culminate in the identification of specific problems and to proceed with the implementation of informed strategies to address them or (b) to commence at the implementation of programs that solve already identified problems. In both cases, the relationship between community engagement and social research is observed at the implementation stage depending on the role that may be required of them.

To enhance ownership of projects as mentioned previously, engaging them in research that helps to identify their problems would also be helpful. Focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and free listing may be employed to engage members of the community in the processes of identifying the problems that affect them. Yakubu et al. (2018) recommends both quantitative and qualitative research methods including town hall meetings or community meeting, combination of focus group discussion with key informant interviews to inform the development of the community engagement methods adopted. The establishment of community advisory boards may be necessary for some projects while community survey may be conducted for the community engagement plan. The following are specific stages of social research and community engagement:

- (1) The identification of a topic or problem;
- (2) The development of a theoretical framework (which could be skipped if the study is inductive);
- (3) Statement of research questions;
- (4) Data collection;
- (5) Data analyses;
- (6) Submission of findings in reports;
- (7) The implementation of recommendations;
- (8) Evaluation of recommendations in step 7;
- (9) Identify any emergent problems and continue the cycle.

These stages are discussed in some more detail below.

- (1) ***The identification of a topic or problem:*** A major factor in the selection of a project topic is the availability of up to date materials and research data (Izedomi 2005). In cases of serious doubt as to the possibility of getting relevant data and up to date materials for the study, it is advisable that the researcher avoid undertaking such a project. Among the fundamental questions a researcher must answer before embarking on a study is – will the proposed topic make specific contributions to knowledge? If the answer is no, then it is not worth the efforts.
- (2) ***The development of a theoretical framework*** (which could be skipped if the study is inductive): This is optional depending on the nature of the study. The stage of theoretical development or framework involves familiarization with existing studies, which we refer to as the literature review. More specifically, it refers to the application of theory to existing studies to develop perspectives that would guide the rest of the project. In qualitative or inductive studies, researchers may not complete this component of their work before commencing the data collection. Typically, however, the literature review enables the researcher to identify various aspects of the subject matter that have already been covered in other studies. This way, they are able to determine which gaps need to be filled and what methods to employ to achieve the goals.
- (3) ***Statement of research questions:*** These are broad questions that the researcher states and uses as a guide throughout the rest of the study. This section, usually numbered in question form, assists to probe deeply into the core issues of the research problem. While it is clearer to state the research problem in question form, it can also be phrased in a statement form depending on the researcher's interest. Unresolved issues or research problems that require answers may also be stated in question form. It is based on these research questions that survey instruments and interview schedules are generated and research objectives.
- (4) ***Data collection:*** This is the entire process of gathering, obtaining, and collating useful information (data) relevant to the research problems. Importantly, the data collected must be relevant to the study objectives and hypotheses. However, the type of study will determine the nature of data to be collected and the method to be adopted. Qualitative techniques may include interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. Quantitative methods may include surveys.

- (5) **Data analyses:** This involves a detailed description or explanation of the data collected by the researcher. In the analyses stage, the researcher examines the data to see what relationships exist among the variables so as to develop explanatory statements about them. In qualitative research, analyses may consist of the identification of various themes, categories, and patterns in transcribed interviews and notes from observations. Specific reference should be made to the statistical or non-statistical tools used to describe and interpret the data collected from various sources for the research purpose. Output in quantitative analyses could take the form of tables, graphs, charts, equations depending on the topic and nature of the study.
- (6) **Submission of findings in reports:** Before the submission of study's findings packaged in form of a report, it is important to consider a few things. From the introduction to the abstract/citation page, the research must ensure that laid down format and writing style is adhered to. Also, there is the need to ensure the use of simple, precise and clear language to enable the readers and audience understand the message/content of the report. As much as possible, the researcher should avoid ambiguous/vulgar language, pay attention to typographical and grammatical errors, etc. Where there are tables, figures, maps, charts and statistical equations contained in the report, the minutest details must be included for everyone to understand.
- (7) **The implementation of recommendations:** This is one area that poses great challenge in most developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. It is one thing to have beautiful and wonderful recommendations at the end of a research effort, implementation of such recommendation is yet another issue as many lofty research efforts end up on the shelves gathering dust by the day. If recommendations from many great research efforts are implemented, obviously, the society will be better for it. In action oriented research, implementation of recommendations do not take place after the completion of the entire project, but simultaneously with the rest of the project stages.
- (8) **Project evaluation and assessment:** Typically, this practice is to engage in periodic evaluation and assessment of the project after its completion. In action oriented studies, however, the technique is a kind of continuous assessment of the projects to determine, periodically, the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies or research and program design. Periodic recommendations result in changes in the methods and define new strategies for improvement. It should be noted, moreover, that even in cases

where such completed projects are handed over to the community or other stakeholders to manage, efforts must be made to ensure proper monitoring through feedback. This will concretize the changes that were brought about through the project or engagement of the community.

The above cycle of action research is closely related to the processes of community mobilization (Knowledge for Health K4-Health, n.d). There are several models of community development cycles. In a mobilization program on health by Save the Children International, project staff who engaged community members and leaders worked with the following 7-point community engagement:

- (1) Identification of health and community concern;
- (2) Organization of the community for action;
- (3) Exploration of the issues and set priorities;
- (4) Planning together with the community;
- (5) Implementation of projects together with the community;
- (6) Evaluation of projects together with community members;
- (7) Sustainability.

From the above, it is obvious that the emphasis is on participatory programs in which members of the communities are encouraged to collaborate with the researchers in planning projects, implementing and evaluating them. An examination of a more comprehensive cycle of engagement demonstrates an approach that recommends the involvement of the community right from the start of the identification of the problem through its implementation and evaluation and the restart of the cycle. The following are the main stages of the 14-point engagement cycle (which are also known as community participation promotion cycle, or the problem solving cycle, or the social animation cycle):

- (1) Sensitization, awareness creation, and clearance,
- (2) Researcher training,
- (3) Unity organizing,
- (4) Participatory assessment,
- (5) Management training,
- (6) Community action plan (CAP),
- (7) Community project design (CPD)
- (8) Negotiation,
- (9) Implementation begins,
- (10) Monitoring and reporting,
- (11) Work continues until completion,
- (12) Official completion,
- (13) Official completion ceremony,
- (14) Restart the cycle at 3 on unity organization.

- (1) ***Sensitization, awareness creation, and clearance:*** Under the previous discussion on the identification of the elements, the need to understand the nature of the problem and its level of seriousness was discussed. That task entails this process of sensitization and clearance. In this stage also, the mobilizer will have to present himself or herself as well as his team to the community leaders and where appropriate, meet with law enforcement officers particularly if the circumstances require some sort of protection or clearance by the police. These preliminary discussions of the project with the community especially the community leaders will eliminate any potential fears or rumors that could mar the success of the project. Once the community is adequately sensitized and they are aware of the nature and seriousness of the conditions, they may be able to direct the organizers and leaders of the mobilization to appropriate resources and personnel for further collaboration and strategizing.
- (2) ***Researcher training:*** This is an attempt to recruit more participants from the local communities to work with the research team. This way, there will be many more hands than just those who initiated the program or those hired to implement the project. It is possible that these additions to the personnel may cost very little to nothing because some of the trainees might offer or accept to work as volunteers, in which case compensation for their efforts would be limited.
- (3) ***Unity organizing:*** As the mobilizers and their team familiarize themselves with the communities through research, they may observe some differences based on culture and ethnicity for which reason a cross-section of the population may refuse to participate or cooperate with the team. It is for this reason that there has to be some sort of reconciliatory arrangements in order to have all factions and teams on board. It is important to note that this component of community mobilization has to be embarked on at several stages of the project just to ensure that members of the community are at peace with each other and are giving their best towards community empowerment and the success of the project.
- (4) ***Participatory assessment:*** This requires the community mobilizer to identify appropriate strategies to ensure that the community buys into the project and receives the invitation for engagement and collaboration. The role of the community members may range from helping the mobilizing team to identify the actual problems, in the community and the available resources that

could be tapped for the project, and also in establishing the main goals and objectives of the project.

- (5) **Management training:** To enhance community participation, there has to be capacity building in which leaders are trained to manage the processes of mobilization. Such leaders will be equipped with the skills of management, communication, and goal attainment.
- (6) **Community Action Plan (CAP):** This constitutes the core responsibility of strategizing to determine the goals and objectives of the mobilization programme. Mobilizers are expected to interact and collaborate with the community and its leaders, ascertain the problems, and establish the conditions that need changing and how such changes would be brought about. They will consider resource availability and how they could be expended judiciously to foster change. As they plan, they will have to identify changes that should occur over specified periods, say one year, five years, or ten years.
- (7) **Community project design:** Having determined the problems requiring attention, resource availability, and time frames for completion, the mobilizers have to come up with a community project design that concretely map out the activities to be embarked upon. Five questions have to be asked in that regard, and these are (a) What are the specific quantifiable and qualitative objectives to be achieved? (b) Where should the changes be effected in terms of geographical locations? (c) What are the resources available to accomplish our tasks? (d) What strategies are employed to achieve those qualitative and quantifiable objectives? and (e) When shall the specified objectives of the projects be accomplished?
- (8) **Negotiation:** At this stage, the mobilizer strengthens the community partnership by making the necessary adjustments to accommodate the community. This also requires a reconsideration of external resources and what processes will be embarked upon to utilize them.
- (9) **Commence implementation:** When all the necessary resources have been assembled and the mobilizers are certain of what they want to achieve, which projects are to be completed, and what changes are to be effected, they then start to execute their plans.
- (10) **Monitoring and reporting:** Given its orientation in action research and application of sociological as well as other social

science methods to change, mobilizers must continually assess the project implementation to determine its success or failure, to identify areas that require modification in terms of strategy, resource availability, and negotiations. Further stages of the mobilization cycle will be informed by the findings of these evaluations.

- (11) **Work continues until completion:** As the project progresses, participants should not lose sight of the main goals of the particular mobilizers. Mobilizers' interactions with the community should occur with absolute consideration for research and project ethics, recognition of community based or specific values, respect for traditional hierarchies and overall comportment. At the project, mobilizers must leave behind positive memories for the organizations they worked with.
- (12) **Official completion:** At the end of the project, there may be a ceremony to officially mark its completion. While expensive festivities are not recommended, this event has the potential of drawing attention to the collaboration and its achievements. It may also bring the community and mobilizers together and thus strengthen the quest for the former to take ownership of the project.
- (13) **Repetition of the cycle:** As suggested several times throughout this chapter, community mobilization is cyclical and establishes long-term relationships between mobilizers and their beneficiary groups. By the end of the first cycle, other areas requiring attention may have emerged. It is also possible to embark on the projects in phases in an effort to ensure long lasting impact on the community. Therefore, at the end of the first project, the process will continue based on evaluation and observed necessities, modifications in strategies, goals, and established time frames.

The Role of the Researcher in Community Engagement

The outlined strategies of community development clearly demonstrate the strength of the interplay between community engagement and social research. Many applied social researchers embark on cycles of community engagement that typically commence with systematic investigation of social problems or conditions that affect the targeted population. Successful outcomes of community engagement through a researcher's initiative rely on her or his qualities and skills. He or she may assume the role of lead or principal investigator and supervise a team of other researchers. The research component would be implemented by a team made up of the lead investigator, research assistants, traditional institutions, depending on the area of research interest.

The principal investigator occupies a leadership role in the community based action research, and this comes with several other responsibilities. First, he or she must own the project and demonstrate high level of commitment in that leadership position. He or she is responsible not only to the team members, but to the leadership and members of the communities targeted for the research. The saying that "everything falls and rises with leadership" is extremely relevant in this context. The rest of the team may be judged based on the lead researcher's demonstration of self-discipline, comportment, and commitment.

Second, the researcher or investigator must acknowledge and respect the customs and traditions of the communities; this is particularly critical in communities with rich traditional cultures, such as in many African nations, where traditional chiefs and community elders are accorded unqualified reverence. As earlier noted, successful community engagement thrives on some kind of interdependence between the researchers and the communities. The researcher ought to, as a matter of necessity, deal with issues relating to community entry. If the customs demand that the traditional ruler or other members of the community be duly notified before the commencement of the community engagement, it is imperative that the researcher adheres to these rules; this will guarantee maximum support and cooperation of the community in the area of engagement. Sensitization, negotiations, and implementation of strategies will be effective if community leader and elders are made important stakeholders in the project. The leaders may serve as mediators who liaise between the researcher and their communities. In many instances, consultations with traditional community leaders may require the presentation of gifts as part of the initial introduction.

There are several other cultural values that the researcher and community mobilizer must observe. According to Izedomi (2005), in some parts of Nigeria particularly among adherents of some religions in the Northern States, male researchers are prohibited from interacting with housewives. In certain parts of South West also, male researchers are not allowed to interact with the wives of Chiefs, *Obas* or Kings. Violation of such custom is considered a taboo. However, when researchers and community mobilizers involve all parties, particularly major stakeholders like chiefs and religious leaders, their efforts are complimented with successful outcomes.

Third, it is the responsibility of the researcher who embarks on community mobilization to demonstrate vast knowledge on the subject matter of the research. This will strengthen confidence in the researcher and enhance the degree of trust that community members have in him. The researcher should be prepared to answer most if not all the questions that are raised by members of the community which relate to the research

project. The researcher and mobilizer must ensure smooth flow of communication between him or her and the community to enhance mobilization.

Gaining the Trust of the Community in Social Research

Newman (2006), suggests the need to devote a greater attention to developing a science of Community Engagement that can sustain research activities. A systematic approach to Community Engagement requires a clear determination of the goals before embarking on the strategy. These goals range from sharing information with the community members and educating them about research procedures to promote trusted relationship between the researchers and members of the community. It is of uttermost importance to gain the trust of the community, because the lack of it will hinder the effectiveness of any community based research activity. There are several factors that could hinder trust-building in community based research activities. It is critical for all stakeholders involved to examine these factors and address them appropriately to build trust (Greene-Moton et al. 2006). Some of these factors are:

- (i) ***Past experience of the community:*** The community members may feel that they have already been researched by many other groups who just collected data and never gave anything back. Thus, this feeling of past exploitation is one that the research group has to contend with and eventually overcome if they are to be successful.
- (ii) ***The attitude of the researchers:*** Researchers often come from academic institutions. In academia, researchers are expected to be the experts in their field. In this case, having to view community members as experts on community needs and values is a new concept that requires adjusting to (Christopher et al. 2008). It is only when these researchers admit to the expertise of community members on such local issues that the research project can progress smoothly.
- (iii) ***Cultural differences:*** As it is with every human endeavor that involves people from different cultural backgrounds, there is bound to be clashes and misunderstandings. Every interaction between academic and community partners is an exercise in cultural competence and cultural humility (Tervalon and Murray 1997). These misunderstandings can arise in the most unexpected ways, during dialogue sessions, data collection and even during follow-up sessions. Thus, the researchers need to get themselves well acquainted with the culture of the community especially with regards to appropriate language and gestures so as to minimize the occurrence of misunderstandings as much as possible.

After coming to terms with all the key factors that can hinder the progress of the research project, the researchers must clearly map out the strategy they intend to use to gain the trust of the community members for effective community engagement. For trust building to occur, the researchers need to embody certain basic character traits such as *humility, honesty and openness, listening and learning, being straight forward yet respectful in speech.*

In addition, an advisable strategy would be to:

- *Engage early*

Engaging the key community leadership very early on is critical to success. Even during the conceptual stage, when the main ideas for the research activity are still being fine-tuned at the academic institutions, the community leadership should be consulted for their advice and input. That way, a rapport is already built up early on which will come in very handy when the researchers eventually show up at the community to commence the research activity.

- *Get to know the project participants*

The researchers must make it a point to become familiar with the members of the community they will be working in. This does not necessarily mean knowing them as individuals, but rather, it speaks of understanding their perception, and possibly knowledge, of the subject matter in the social cultural context. Ask questions rather than making assumptions, and listen rather than preach, particularly when exploring people's fears and feelings around the research. The best way to get to know the participants is to spend time in the community and liaise with local institutions, such as research institutions based around the communities where the research is to be carried out (Ezezika 2015).

- *Acknowledge the expertise of all partners*

The more the academic researchers acknowledge and trust the expertise of the community partners, the freer the community partners will be to give their best to the research activity. This will definitely not be an easy thing for the researchers to do as it may involve them letting go of certain theories they may have been taught in school. Nevertheless it is essential.

- *Use the right communication methods*

Be upfront about expectations and intentions. Community members appreciate researchers that are very clear about their objectives and what sort of participation they require from the community at every stage of the research activity. Researchers can consider delivering their presentation in the prevailing local language(s) within the community to ensure that nothing is misunderstood or left out.

- **Ensure that communication does not end with the research**

Researchers should ensure that they maintain an ongoing dialogue even when the research activity has officially come to an end. This will involve keeping the community up to date with any discoveries made from the data they helped to generate. The main aim here is to enable the community to directly benefit from the results of the research and ultimately improve their standard of living.

The Role of Community Leaders/Traditional Institutions

The importance of leadership in every community can never be over-emphasized. Community leadership can be defined as “a person who works with others to develop and sustain the health of the community” (Krile 2008). According to Kuponiyi (2008), the purpose of community leadership is to provide guidance for community development, which comes about through planning and execution of projects. Community leadership is essential for the health and sustainability of any community.

Leadership in local communities conventionally consists of a combination of formal leaders, informal leaders, and emergent leaders (Simpson et al. 2010). Formal leaders may include elected leaders as well as religious and cultural leaders. Informal and emergent leaders may include individuals with strong leadership skills who already engage the public on an unofficial basis, or those with a particular interest or passion who may not yet appear as leaders but need a little bit of encouragement. It is imperative to consider the type of leadership that exists within target community and how these different types interact with each other.

The role of community leadership in development projects broadly revolves around mobilization of people, planning meetings, securing finance, and linkage with external parties (Kuponiyi 2008):

- (i) **Mobilization of people:** This involves sensitizing the community and creating awareness of the existence of the particular problem the project aims to solve in order to engage their cooperation for successful execution. The key factor here is the leader’s personal conviction about the necessity for the cause he is ‘selling’ to his people as this would either secure their absolute loyalty throughout the duration of the project or jeopardize the entire mission down the road.
- (ii) **Planning meetings:** After the people have been sensitized, it is the job of the community leaders to organize vital meetings to be held amongst the relevant stakeholders within the community. This will include an initial or ‘kick-off’ meeting at the beginning of the development project and several other meetings as major milestones are crossed. The community leadership will set the agenda for these meetings and ensure that the proceedings occur in a punctual, orderly and peaceful manner.

- (iii) **Securing finance:** Community leadership will take a front role in ensuring that the new money needed for the proposed development project can be made available. This can come from a variety of means, including contributions from the local community members or external sources (as in the case of externally initiated projects).
- (iv) **Linkage with external parties:** This has to do with liaison with external people or organizations for financial or material support for the projects at hand.

Maximizing Collaboration of Leaders in Community Development

In every community, there is at least one individual who is concerned or angry about the presence or prevalence of a certain problem plaguing its people. If this problem is significant enough and threatens the future existence of the community, then it is the job of the leadership to articulate the problems and collaborate with mobilizers to execute sustainable solutions. Thus, for any community development initiative to be successful, it is vital to first of all conduct a systematic investigation of the power structure that exists within that community. Such an analysis will enable one to understand who the local influential decision makers are and the best way to engage them for effective community mobilization. It should be noted that it is only when there is a balance of the different types of leadership that a truly sustainable and efficient development initiative can occur within the community. Formal leaders need informal leaders so that they can (a) keep ideas fresh, (b) stay in touch with their constituency, and (c) gain the support of the local community. On the other hand, informal leaders need formal leaders so that they can (a) gain access to funding, (b) gain a macro perspective, and (c) connect with other influential leaders.

In order to identify and engage the leadership potential that exists within the community for purposes of community engagement, the researcher must look for the answers in the leaders himself. Power/asset mapping is a strategic process for creating an engagement plan that maximizes the engagement of strategic and powerful supporters and minimizes the engagement of opposition. Asset mapping generally involves identifying the skills, talents and interests of the members of the community and compiling this data in an inventory of sorts. The associations of each of the members surveyed should also be examined. It is through analyzing the associations that each individual belongs to, that one may get a better idea of some of the formal leaders that already exist within the community. The mapping may take the form of skills and talent surveys. It may also be questionnaires where members of the community

are asked to nominate which of their colleagues they feel are good leadership candidates.

Once talents and skills of the leaders have been identified and mapped, they can be engaged on a variety of fronts, and regarding community mobilization, the leaders may be organized based on their interests coupled with the talents and skills that have been identified. Informal leaders, for instance, may embark on some initiatives to address issues that they find personally troubling. They may alternatively be engaged for purposes of community mobilization, either as active or passive participants; these can either be role specific or non-role specific. According to Kuponiyi (2008), active participation refers to a situation where the community members, including their leaders, are engaged at every stage of the project, from planning to execution in varying capacities. Passive participation, on the other hand, requires less commitment for which reason, community members may just be called upon to attend meetings, briefings or attend events.

Earlier, the relevance of networking was outlined. Efforts to harness the skills and talents of the leaders for purposes of engaging their communities may exploit opportunities for networking and dialogue. In this technique, community members will establish links and create partnerships with community mobilizers.

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