



## Community development- A review of literature

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### Abstract

Community development is a well-articulated concept in the development discourse. Literature and scholarship are abundant in community development as the theory and practice of community development has been considered as a key policy agenda by national governments as well as international agencies. Community development is indeed a broad concept. Community development essentially implies empowering individuals and groups through building skills to make deep changes in society. This paper tries to look into some of the important literature regarding community development. The paper discusses the concept, basic principles of community development, asset-based community development, various theories of community development, major challenges of community development and lastly it discusses about community development in India.

**Keywords:** Community development, literature and scholarship

### Introduction

Many scholars trace the origin of modern community development as a discipline to post-World War II reconstruction efforts to improve less developed countries (Wise 1998) [24]. Others cite the American “war on poverty” of the 1960s with its emphasis on solving neighbourhood housing and social problems as a significant influence on contemporary community development (Green and Haines 2002) [7]. The roots of community development came from observations that communities were disintegrated due to technological, economic and cultural changes that occurred during the industrial revolution and in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the same thing happened to North America and Global South after decolonization (<https://canadianglobalresponse.ca/portfolio/community-development/>). Today, community development has become more holistic and encompasses community wellbeing in terms of social, economic, cultural, environmental and political aspects. The International Association for Community Development, an international and democratic organization, accredited with the UN, having a network of more than 70 countries defined the modern concept of community development as a practice based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunities, equality and social justice, through the organization, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings (Strategic Plan-2020-24, IACD, 2020). In simple terms, it is something that involves planned efforts to enhance the quality of life of its residents by increasing their capacities and building assets. It is a planned effort to build assets that increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of life (Green and Haines 2008: 7). Community development has evolved into a recognized discipline drawing from a wide variety of academic fields including sociology, economics, political science, planning, geography, and many others (Phillips & Pittman, 2009). It usually has three major elements: (a) community members’ well-being or

welfare involving both material sufficiency and non-economic aspects of living such as health and education; (b) resource development, involving increased production and efficiency; and (c) organizational development, involving the maintenance and creation of social and economic structures through which members of the community may channel their energies for the betterment of community living (Baker, 1989) [1].

### Concept of Community Development

The community development literature has varied views and notions about development in the community and development of the community (Shaffer & Summers, 1989) [18]. This distinction is often characterised as process versus outcomes (Robinson & Green, 2011). The community development is the combination of two terminology community and development. Both have wider and varied meanings with respect to social, economic, political, cultural and environmental aspects under study. To understand the concept of community development, it is necessary to understand first what the community is and then what development is. The word community comes from the Latin word, ‘communitas’ which means common. Generally, community is defined through geographical location. Mattessich and Monsey (2004:56) [13] defined community in terms of people who live within a geographically defined area and who have social and psychological ties with each other and with the place where they live. A group of people sharing common living accommodation and goods can also be considered as a community. Worsley (1987) [25] termed community as locality, denoted as a network of interrelationships and inferred it to the community spirit or community feeling. Communities can also be defined by common religion, common language, beliefs or shared interest etc. Most of us belong to more than one community, say, for example a person can be part of a religious community, a business community, a teaching community, a labour community and so on. Whereas development involves a wide range of changes in a variety of social,

cultural, economic, political and environmental indicators. Development can and will mean very different things in different contexts. Development is a process that increases choices, options, diversification, and more change. It refers to the upward movement of the whole social system by providing better living conditions like adequate food, better housing, improved facilities of health, education and training and the general improvement of cultural facilities (Gunnar Myrdal 1960). It involves change, improvement and vitality – a directed attempt to improve participation, flexibility, equity, attitudes, the functions of institutions and the quality of life (Shaffer, 1989) <sup>[18]</sup>. It is crucial to get positive transformation and renewing bigger change. It involves structural change and refinement of social, economic and political institutions and organizations (Boothroyd & Davis, 1993) <sup>[2]</sup>. Initially United Nations (1945) defined community development as a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. But when realized the scope and expansion of activity, it elaborated the definition and again in 1948 the United Nations created a basic definition for community development. It says, “Community Development is a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community’s initiative.” Moreover, as time passes the area and context of community development has enlarged and it became multidimensional. By the end of twentieth century, community development has been recognized as a field by acting as a catalyst to the issues and problems of mankind and society. This indicates that communities became empowered, started to identify their own needs and problems and their collective actions made possible to mutually take control over their own lives (Kenny, 1999) <sup>[10]</sup>. Community development is both a process and an outcome by which communities become more responsible, organize and plan together, develop healthy lifestyles, empower themselves, reduce poverty and inequality, generate employment and other economic opportunities, achieve political goals and conserve environment. It is a holistic approach grounded in principles of empowerment, human rights, inclusion, social justice, self-determination and collective action (Kenny, 2007). The Planning Commission in India defined the Community Development Programme in these words: “Community development is an attempt to bring about a social and economic transformation of village life through the efforts of the people themselves.”

For effective community development there should be a long-term endeavour for well-planned, inclusive, equitable, holistic and integrated approach to support each community member to experience the desirable benefits available through shared responsibility and collaborative outlook. Such kind of community development recognizes and builds community capacity to balance the competing interests and improve the relationships within the community. Ultimately, the Community Development is considered as the economics of rural reconstruction.

### Basic Principles of Community Development

The basic principles of community development practice have evolved from top-down approach to grassroots participatory approach (Sillitoe, 2002) <sup>[19]</sup>. Ife (2009) <sup>[8]</sup> has given some key principles of community development.

They are (1) Bottom up Development, (2) Value, Wisdom, Knowledge and Skills from below, (3) Self-reliance, Independence and Interdependence, (4) Ecology and Sustainability, (5) Diversity & Inclusiveness, (6) Organic Change, (7) Participation, (8) Consensus/Cooperation and Conflict/Competition, (9) Community Needs, (10) Community Empowerment, (11) Affirming Human Rights, and (12) Community Ownership.

### Asset-based Community Development

Under economic context, assets can be forms of capital such as property, stocks and bonds, and cash. Under community context, assets may be seen as various forms of capital as well. Ferguson and Dickens (1999) talk about five forms of community capital: physical, human, social, financial, and political. According to Green and Haines, (2007) <sup>[6]</sup> community development is a planned effort to produce assets that increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of life. These assets may include several forms of community capital: physical, human, social, financial, political, cultural and environmental. They are as under.

1. Human Capital – Quality Education and Health
2. Physical Capital – Natural Resources and Physical Infrastructure – Transport and Communication, Energy
3. Social Capital – Relationship, Cohesion, Mutual Aid, Social Media
4. Financial Capital – Financial Institutions, Entrepreneurship, Digital Technology
5. Political Capital – Participation, Planning, Power, Political Structure, Leadership, Governance
6. Cultural Capital – Values and Ethics
7. Environmental Capital – Conservation and Preservation, Sustainable Development

Human capital may be defined as skills, talents, and knowledge of community members. These human qualifications are the foundations for community sustenance. In other words, human development is directly related to community development. It is to be noted here that not only are adults part of the human capital equation, but children and youth also contribute. It may include labour market skills, leadership skills, general education background, artistic development and appreciation, health, and other skills and experience (Green and Haines 2007:81) <sup>[6]</sup>. Many studies have referred the importance of economic well-being of investment in human capital. In contrast to physical capital, human capital is mobile. So, as community development increases, skills, talents, and knowledge may change due to many kinds of cultural, societal, and institutional mechanisms. To actualize the community development capacity, the community must organize shared educational activities in order to familiarize the society with working in groups. In today’s knowledge-driven economies, access to quality education and the chances for development are two sides of the same coin. For both countries and individuals, there is a direct and indisputable link between access to quality education and economic and social development (Brende & Solberg, 2015) <sup>[3]</sup>. That means quality education plays a significant role in promoting community development. It is a strategy for augmenting the scope of community empowerment and well-being. In other words, quality education provides meaningful tools for improving community welfare. It helps in character building and creates value-laden society. Through education,

community gets involved in the learning process and develop skills for better social and economic life. It is a kind of community investment which focuses on the intersection between education and community development in an attempt to identify shared goals and seed a conversation between the two sectors. Better education is correlated to higher wage level and lower level of unemployment (Mester, 2015) <sup>[14]</sup>. The most important contribution of education is not only to upgrade the living standards of citizens but also to enable them to become better citizens. In addition, education today is a prerequisite for development and also an effective means for both taking knowledge-based decisions and improving democracy. Education improves and strengthens developmental capacities of individuals, communities, groups, institutions, and countries. In short, education can create a safer, healthier and more prosperous world and enhance the living standards by changing the visions and perspectives of individuals (Turkkahraman, 2012) <sup>[22]</sup>.

Education contributes to the stability of the community members by emboldening equality, making the members of the community self-dependence and confident, promoting peace and security, sparing them from exploitation etc. Many countries try to enlarge community development through various skill development initiatives like employment training programmes, self-employment assistance, financial literacy, setting up of community learning networks, peer learning, adult education, experiential learning programmes for youth etc. With good education, members of the community are in a better position to understand the difference between right and wrong. Besides, it helps people know more about their rights and responsibilities as well as the law in general.

Society and education complete each other. Society cannot carry on without education and vice versa. Education affects not only the person being educated but also the whole community by starting from his/her family. In other words, raising sufficient number of efficient people for more prosperous society is the duty of education and educational institutions which have certain functions in the community (Turkkahraman, 2012) <sup>[22]</sup>. Education is a right for everyone. It is a right for girls, just as it is for boys. It is a right for disabled children, just as it is for everyone else. Communities and countries that succeed in achieving gender parity in education will reap substantial benefits relating to health, equality, and job creation (Brende & Solberg, 2015) <sup>[3]</sup>. According to OECD, providing every child with access to education and the skills needed to participate fully in society would boost GDP by an average 28% per year in lower-income countries and 16% per year in high-income countries for the next 80 years. (OECD report - Universal Basic Skills: What countries tend to gain, 2015).

Besides, physical capital such as all natural resources, building, roads, technology, infrastructure within a community also play a vital role in community development. Under infrastructure, residential neighborhoods, parks, a riverfront, industrial areas, strip development, schools, government buildings, a university or college, a museum, a prison, and many others are involved. These are considered a critical component for community development. Even public and private investment for development and redevelopment of structures and infrastructure such as residential, commercial, industrial and roads, sewer, water come under physical capital. In

economic terms, the machinery, buildings, office or warehouse supplies, vehicles, and computers that a firm owns are all considered part of its physical capital. Any technical progress and technological advancement which are tangible are also physical capital. Today, the twin forces of globalization and technology are transforming our economies, workplaces, communities and families.

Not only natural resources and education but social capital such as social relationships within a community i.e. the trust, norms, and social networks that are established also play significant role in community development. (Green and Haines 2007) <sup>[6]</sup>. It includes the stock of active connections among people: “the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviours that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible” (Cohen and Prusak 2001: 4) <sup>[5]</sup>. Besides, social capital is characterized by reciprocity, social cohesion, volunteerism, mutual benefit, neighbourliness, and a variety of other conditions that relate to relationships between and among individuals and the organizations through which they conduct the civic business of the community. Social capital represents relationships among family members, friends or ethnic groups, relationships across ethnic groups, the workplace, with people having shared interests etc. Social capital describes circumstances in which individuals can use membership in groups and networks to secure benefits (Sobel, 2002) <sup>[20]</sup>. Community social capacity means the extent to which members of a community can work together effectively (Mattessich and Monsey, 1997). Communities with high community social capacity can identify their needs; establish priorities and goals; develop plans, of which the members of that community consider themselves “owners”; allocate resources to carry out those plans; and carry out the joint work necessary to achieve goals (Phillips & Pittman, 2009) <sup>[16]</sup>. Jane Jacobs recognized the importance of community social capacity for community vitality (Jacobs 1961) <sup>[9]</sup>. The level of community social capacity (or community social capital) influences community development in two broad ways: structural and cognitive. Structurally, interconnections among people within a community create a web of social networks. These networks facilitate community development by enabling the flow of information, ideas, products, and services among residents. Cognitively, interconnections create a shared sense of purpose, increase commitment, promote mutual trust, and strengthen norms of reciprocity among community residents. (Uphoff, 2000; Phillips & Pittman, 2009) <sup>[23, 16]</sup>. Any identifiable set of activities pursued by a community in order to increase community social capacity is community building (Mattessich and Monsey, 1997). Fundamentally, community building concerns strengthening the capacity of neighbourhood residents, associations, and organizations to work, individually and collectively, to foster and sustain positive neighbourhood change (Kubisch et al., 1995) <sup>[12]</sup>. Today, under social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc. have created a totally different world for community reaching one another online. Social Media as a part of social capital has become a vital tool in re-creating community connections. Today it has become more powerful instrument for far away relationships and broader coverage of community engagement. It has brought information to our fingertips, and people look to their online networks for news and ways to create change.

### Major Theories of Community Development

There are many theories of community development. York perceives Community Development Theory as the joining together of community agencies, a deep political action for societal change and the building of local competencies. According to Paiva, community development theories essentially deal with structural changes in society, social and economic integration at the local level, development of local institutions, and rural reconstruction (Paiva, 1977). At the same time, Johns and Pandey view it as a means to attain distributive, participative, and human development. There were efforts to consider community development as a means of collective problem solving and empowerment as well (Johns & Pandey, 1981). Similarly, scholars like Paine perceived it as a strategy to develop social capital and ensure social inclusion within the community (Payne, 1997). There are seven key elements in community development and local agency building. These include power, relationships, structure, shared meaning, change communication, motivation for decision making and integration of all these elements and complexities at the field level. Based on these elements, there are seven major theories of community development.

**Social Capital Theory:** According to this theory, as stated by Putnam, community development is built through the formation of social capital within society. Social capital implies the trust, networks and resources that are intrinsic to society and community. The theory argues that trust and networks build social capital within the community. This social capital fosters better civic engagement, public action, participation of the local community, self-reliant economic development and overall prosperity and harmony in the community. Thus, social capital theory believes in the critical role of creating internal trust and affinity among members for attaining the goals of community development (Putnam, 1993).

**Structural Functionalism:** Structural functional theory of community development, argues that each society contains some structure with specific functions. These structures include educational institutions, healthcare, business entities, informal groups etc. Therefore, community development needs capacity building of these structures in such a way that they can enhance the quality of the functions. Structural functional theories are useful in community development as it helps to identify the weak institutions as well as strong institutions in a society and urge the practitioners to train, nurture and develop those structures which are dysfunctional. But structural-functional theories are criticised on the ground that these theories largely undermine the role of power in society. Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton are the key exponents of this theory (Parsons & Shils, 1951).

**Conflict Theory:** According to conflict theories, power and its manifestation play a key role in society. There are conflicts among various social classes and groups. Power difference and the resultant exclusion of certain sections of society is a hard reality in community life. Therefore, it is important to understand the interest of different groups in society, how power is distributed and used in society and how less powerful people are silenced in the process of development. Wallerstein, Marx, Foucault etc belongs to these ideas (Bhattacharya, 2004).

**Symbolic Interactionism:** In this theory, as explained by Blumer, emphasis is given to the symbolic nature of human interactions, rather than a mechanical pattern of interaction. People give importance to place, event, symbols and language. Therefore, in community development, the pertinent question is how people develop shared meaning and idea towards development and social change. In this theory, shared meaning and gestures of the community members are critically important in building community solidarity. The theory believes in a shared vision owned by the community about their common future. Hence, in symbolic interactionism, a community development practitioner should focus on bringing people together under a shared idea around which community solidarity will be created (Blumer, 1969).

**Communicative Action Theory:** This theory upholds the primacy of participatory engagement of people, deliberations, discussions and robust democratic networks in the community that can initiate change. It is the communicative activities and discussion that integrate the people within a society and make them work around common ideas. As rightly put by Habermas, the participation of the citizen in the problems that affect their lifeworld is most important in this framework. This communicative action theory is influenced by the intersection of technical and scientific knowledge with that of local and practical wisdom (Habermas, 1987).

**Rational Choice Theory:** As the name itself indicates, the rational choice theory states that human beings make rational decision and choices based on utility, happiness and profits. In his theory, Marshall stated that the rational man would analyse different choices available to him and select the most useful alternative. The theory argues that collective behaviour of the people can be expected under two circumstance. One is selective incentives like an increased stake in the community, recognition, tax breaks etc. Second is the threat of sanctions if he/ she doesn't participate. Hence, while applying to the community development context, rational choice theorists urge the practitioners to focus on providing appropriate rewards for community members and minimize the risk for non-participation (Marshall, 1895).

**Structuration Theory:** In structuration theory, as stated by Giddens, human behaviours are based on structures(rules) and agency (human action). Each community has their ideas, rules and behaviour that needs to be taken in consideration in community development practice. He believes that cultural traditions and patterns become modalities in each society and this needs to be analysed in social and community work. Structuration theory gives importance to the role of human agency in development (Giddens, 1984).

### Major Challenges of Community Development

There are many challenges to community development. According to Lee, one of the major limitations is the undue reliance on public funding for community development that affects the outcome. Apart from that, many experiences on community development show that these are short term projects aimed to get targeted outcome. This affects continuity and kills the community spirit (Lee, 2003).

Studies on the failure of community development program reflect that in many of the developing countries the programme failed due to the lack of understanding about deep-rooted social conflicts and resource scarcity. The complex social problems within the rural community were much beyond the capacity of rural community development workers to handle. Issues of land ownership, distribution of rural wealth caste system, exploitation by elites and related complexities cannot be addressed without the active participation of the entire community (Dayal, 1966).

Research evidence also shows that community development programmes often focussed on providing social services in rural areas without emphasising increasing rural income and asset base (Dey, 1992). This is one of the main reasons for unsuccessful programmes.

Another study conducted within the context of India also found that the main reason for the failure of community development is the lack of an integrated approach. Although these approaches were partially successful and focused on the delivery of services, in many localities the initiatives were not 'organically' evolved. Rather, there were efforts to impose the initiatives on the people without waiting for actual participation in decision making (Cavaye, 2001). He identified some core dilemmas including the perception between involvement and elitism, provision and empowerment, professionalism and voluntarism, maintenance improvement, focussed action and community unity etc (Cavaye, 2001).

### **Community Development in India**

Many research evidence highlight the diverse implications of community development programmes in India. One of the seminal works on the community development programme was written by Bhattacharya. In his book, the author clearly states the origin, development and implementation of the programme and the core ideological underpinning behind it (Bhattacharya, 1990). He argues that although the residents were perceived as agents of social change, the community development programme failed to attain the desired impact mainly because of the loss of sight from policymakers after the initial euphoria. Many programmes were added without looking into the actual needs of the community. Hence, community development programmes relegated to rural development projects. Apart from that, the organisers were unable to distinguish community development from economic development. When the uniqueness of the ideology lost its relevance, the programme also failed (Bhattacharya, 1990).

In his paper on community development projects in India, Desai attempted to analyse the programme within the framework of sociology. He explained the critical importance of community development in an agrarian society like India and highlighted the comprehensive meaning provided by the union government in defining community to include all the people living in a locality irrespective of caste and religion. He argues that the ideological foundations of the community development program emerge from the social reconstruction projects of Sevagram and Sarvodaya centres in Bombay state, the Firca experiments in Madras, and the pilot projects conducted in Gorakhpur. The paper explains that, unlike other movements to make social change in India, the community development program was realistic and intended to reconstruct rural India through active participation of the rural society (Desai, 1958).

A recent study conducted within the context of North East India highlighted the role of social participation and social accountability in implementing community development programmes with a special focus on women empowerment, capacity building, development of agro-industries with the intervention of local NGOs. The author believes that participation and accountability are two essential features that need to inculcate in society through a deliberate effort by outside agencies or community-based institutions (Kasar, 2019). In this critical analysis on the community development programme in India, Neale argued that the programme failed because of many reasons including rapid expansion within a short period, incompetent development officers, insufficient capacity building training, lack of funding, lack of innovation and adaptation and apathy from the community (Neale, 1983). In another interesting study on the community development programme in India, Nayar analysed the political impact of the community development programme and argued that it has enhanced the political participation of the rural peasants and changed their political behaviour (Nayar, 1960). Critics argue that the community development programme in India failed mainly because of the lack of participation by the local community as it was a town-down initiative controlled by bureaucrats. The village-level workers ignored the rural power and worked with local elites which hindered the emergence of collective action and participation of the people in community development (Cavaye, 2001). One of the core limitations of the existing evidence on community development in India is the lack of recent research on the topic. Since community development programmes lost their charm long back, there is hardly any research that substantiates the current relevance of community development within the context of globalisation and liberalisation.

A recent effort to conceptualise community development is visible in the book written by Manohar Pawar. In his book on social and community development practice, he provides a comprehensive analysis of the concept within the Indian context, the current status, methods, limitations and future of community development policy and practice in the country (Pawar, 2011).

In his study on community development and the role of self-help groups, Desai and Joshi argue that one of the effective strategies to ensure collective action in community development is the formation of membership-based groups. The study showed that membership in self-help groups has enhanced the participation of women in household decision making. But there is no evidence to show the tangible impact of the programme on an increase in income or socio-economic status in society (Desai & Joshi, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

Thus, it can be said that the concept of Community Development has evolved over a period of time and has become wider than earlier. It intends to engage with communities to attain participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, social justice, equality etc. (CDF, 2017). It reflects the aspiration, actions and consciousness of the people. It now deals with not only general social, political and economic aspects of the society but also combines them with the latest technology, skills and digital development in every field. Today, community development can be linked with grassroots innovators for solving local problems and collectively build more developed society.

Thus, according to Goel (2014), community development is important because it fosters active citizenships in which people work together to improve the conditions in which they live for common prosperity.

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