

LOCAL AUTHORITY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

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PART A

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Introduction

Community is a broad term that used to refer to a group of people sharing common interests. Community members may share a geographical location, same interests, affiliation or an identity. Community engagement is the practice of collaboratively working through people, groups of people and special interest parties sharing a geographical proximity or identity. Similar situations force the various groups to forge collaborations to help them address various issues affecting their well-being. Community engagement has been a very effective tool in transformation of communities since the partnerships and collaborations help mobilize resource and manpower to get tasks done. A positive relationship between the partners serve as a crucial ingredient for enforcing policy change, and upgrade of programs and practices. Engagements in communities are generally guided by principles, approaches and strategies which form the framework. All the applicable principles and strategies must maintain respect for the rights of all members in the community. It precedes that all the members have to be informed, consulted and involved before making any changes to the systems. Community engagement practices also foster and enhance the virtue of trust as the building block to ensuring a sustainable and effective governance in the long run.

Best practices In Community Engagement

Community engagement comprises of principles, programs, and standards whose purpose is to ensure a smooth working of the community. The process of community engagement is built

from the principles of social-psychology, organizational development, cultural anthropology, political science, public policy and sociology. The main concepts are drawn from the literature on community development and participation to improve structures in an existing community. The art in community engagement emanates from understanding the sensitivity and skill required to drive the stakeholders towards a certain direction or effort. It is through skill that it becomes possible to convince the stakeholders to form collaborations, partnerships and coalitions (Mulinge, 2020). Skill and sensitivity are not the only incentives for running a community engagement process. The process is also labor and resource dependent; there is need for financial resources, and manpower to get things done. Community leaders have a huge task of making the best choices for the community and also decide what issues to be resolved. Therefore, there is need for a solid grounding on what information is available, techniques are required and which tools to build and implement effective strategies.

The basic pillars of community engagement comprise of policy, people, practice and performance. Community engagement policies support the implementation of its framework across the various areas of practice. Aho, Hamalainen & Salonen (2020) posit that policies guide how the various activities can be carried out under stipulated guidelines. People constitute an integral part of community engagement process. There is need to come up with a team responsible with running the day to day activities of the community including spearheading changes. The work of the community engagement team is to develop and deliver the best plan to be implemented to effect changes. Practice refers to stipulated affirmative actions and framework that form the basis of operating a community engagement. Practice for community engagement process are based on consistent improvement of the relationships within the community (Adhikari et al., 2019). Effective engagement and proactive measures are necessary ensure there is adherence to the

community goals and disciplines. Lastly, performance play an important role in evaluating successes in community engagement. Evaluation of performance helps to establish and document whether or not the community engagement practices are effective in solving community problems.

Community engagement practices must be decision oriented, goal driven and value based. By being decision oriented, it will give the stakeholders an opportunity to participate in the step to step community engagement activities. The opinions of the stakeholders about the projects to be undertaken are important in the decision-making process of the community engagement. An effective community engagement process puts decision making at the center and through participation which allows the decision to be shaped by the stakeholders (De Weger et al., 2018). A community engagement process is said to be goal driven if it is focused around specific, planned and purposeful outcomes. Therefore, there is need to clearly outline what information will be useful to the process and what roles the stakeholders will play to contribute to the attainment of the project goals. According to Leidig & Oakes (2021), the values held by the stakeholders go a long way in shaping the opinions, dreams, and hopes of the community. Effective community engagement should be value-based in the sense that it should acknowledge the thoughts that the stakeholders bring on board. In some instances it is allowed for the shareholders to shift discussion from personal positions to shared values of the whole community.

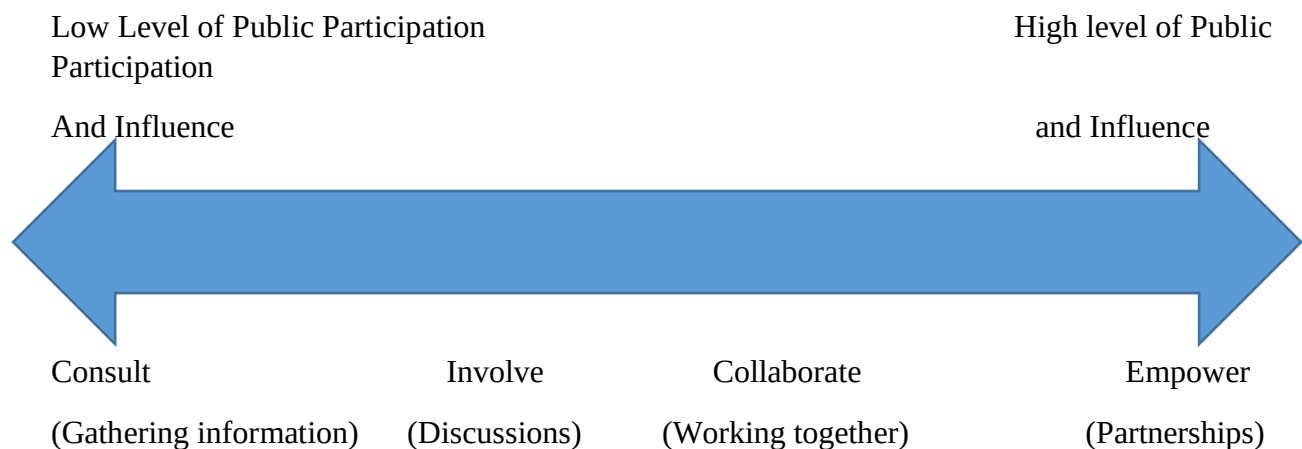
A well-coordinated community engagement process tends to foster good understanding and harmony hence ensuring sustainability prevails. Every member of the community is invited to add their input to the discourse. Through collaborative discussions it is possible to combine cultural, environmental, financial and social differences to come up with sustainable decisions. Financial stability is where the community engagement manages to comfortably afford the cost of implementing a decision. Cultural and social sustainability gives the community engagement

process and opportunity to accommodate the different cultures within the community (Williamson, 2022). The policies put in place should be sensitive enough not to negatively impact the culture and social relations of the community members. Environmental sustainability provides that the policies installed through community engagement should not interfere with the natural environment. Sustainability in terms of stakeholders input entail ensuring the opinions and ideas of the participants are factored into decisions made. A balance of all the spheres of the community engagement process must ensure an overall sustainability of the changes effected.

Among the guiding principles of community engagement include inclusivity, early involvement, coordinated approach, transparency and accountability, timely communication, mutual respect and trust and continuous improvement. The community engagement process should be designed in a way that gives all the community members an opportunity to contribute to the discourse. Through inclusivity it becomes possible for the stakeholders to develop a balanced perspective that will propel the community towards set goals (Zhang, Warner & Firestone, 2019). The community engagement builds relationships with the various stakeholders through a wide range of PR activities aimed at building relations. Involving the community should be done as early as possible to give the stakeholders enough time to evaluate the needs and issues before they make a choice of whether or not to fully participate in it. Coordinated approach ensures that none of the community members is left behind in every step along the way until realization of the community goals (Wetli, 2019). Transparency and accountability in the community engagement process ensures the stakeholders fully understand their roles including how their individual roles may affect the overall outcome. Timely communication is very key when it comes to community engagement since it ensures information reach all the relevant parties in a timely, accurate and understandable manner. Mutual respect and trust is essential when dealing stakeholders in

community engagement process. Through mutual respect it is possible create an environment that not only embraces divergent views but also values the interest of all people. After successfully setting up structures to effect a positive change in the community it is essential to ensure there is continuous assessment and improvement. Regular assessment will ensure the systems are kept in check to ensure they continue to server their purpose; improvement may be done where necessary to further enhance results.

The spectrum of engagement in community engagement comprises of different types of engagement between the community and the stakeholders. The spectrum ranges from ‘consult’ on the left to ‘empower’. There is a corresponding increase in expectation from the public as you move through the spectrum from left to right (Fraser et al., 2019). Relationships and expectations increase from consult, involve, collaborate to empower; the main focus here is not on the task but rather on relationship.



During the consultation level the stakeholders must pledge to carefully listen to the aspirations and concerns of the community members. The aim of consulting is to add the input the public to the decision-making process. It also helps in obtaining feedback including gathering the

relevant information and alternative to be put into practice. The involvement step of the community engagement spectrum promises the community to work with them to ensure all of their aspirations and concerns will be reflected in the decision that will be made in the subsequent steps. The main goal of involving the participants in community engagement make them part of the journey toward the bigger goal (Barnes & Marlatt, 2022). During the collaboration stage of the spectrum, the community engagement team promises to work with community to consolidate the best steps and alternatives to provide solutions to the needs of the community. The goal here is to ensure enough discussions have been held to foster total agreement between community members. Under empower, the lead team needs to reaffirm to the community that it will work with them side by side to ensure the common goal is achieved. The goal of empower is to create a supportive environment under which the community together with the other stakeholders partner to ensure realization of set goals.

The community engagement team comprises of a group of people selected to serve under different capacities to help in the implementation of community engagement framework. One of the role of community engagement team is take part in the initial assessment of the project in company of the communications team. Secondly the team is responsible for working with the project lead in the development of the community engagement plans. The community engagement team is also tasked with the responsibility of promoting engagement activities such as requesting for proposals and tenders. Another responsibility of the community engagement team is to provide oversight on the project at hand. Apart from overseeing the progress of the project, lead team is responsible for ensuring that the community engagement activities remain compliant to the community engagement framework and policies (Wilkins, 2018).Lastly the community engagement lead team evaluates and monitors the performance community enjoyment activities.

The participants in a community engagement process have a role of asking questions and giving their views on the community engagement approach. They also have a responsibility of advocating and airing out the needs of the community on behalf of the rest of the members. Where the provided options may not be suitable, they are invited to suggest alternatives that they are confident will be useful to the community. The participants are also invited to challenge the community engagement lead team on what best practices need to be incorporated in the process. It is the work of the participants in a community engagement process to provide input and give feedback within the stipulated project timelines. Lastly, the participants in the community engagement process must ensure they encourage other community members to offer their input into their decision making process.

Conclusion

Conclusively, community engagement comprises of principles, programs, and standards whose determination is to ensure a smooth working of the community. The basic pillars of community engagement comprise of policy, people, practice and performance. Also, community engagement policy supports the implementation of its framework across the various areas of practice. Community engagement practices have to be decision oriented, goal driven and value based. The process tends to foster good understanding and harmony hence ensuring sustainability prevails. Every member of the community is invited to add their input to the decision-making process. Some of the guiding principles of community engagement comprise of inclusivity, early involvement, coordinated approach, transparency and accountability. Spectrum of community engagement comprises of different types of engagement between the community and the stakeholders. It ranges from ‘consult’ on the left to ‘empower’ on the right. From left to right, the relationships between the lead team, and the other stakeholders increase from consult to involve

to collaborate and, to empower. The main role of the role of community engagement team is to take part in the initial assessment of the project and monitor performance. On the other hand, participants in a community engagement process have a role of asking questions and giving views on the community engagement approach.

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