

Mainstreaming Community Development as a Key Driver for Sustainable National Development

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Abstract

Community development is probably one of the most used words in the vocabulary of politicians, development consultants and day-to-day talk among those involved in shaping the future in under developed and developing countries. Success stories are few and there seems to be little guarantee of success in the outcome of a community development project. The reason being that community development projects often originates in charity, or is the result of social engineering. Both origins lack the key ingredients of sustainability, whilst the latter is simply destined to fail. In search of solutions for this problem, this paper introduces the latest basic needs theoretical paradigm that also lays the necessary foundation for sustainability in community development projects and programmes. It is also postulated that community development often merely serves as a tool for decision makers to be used if and when needed. It is time to put the “human” back in community development projects and in doing so, the drive should not be to elevate community development to the position of a key driver for sustainable national development, but rather to mainstream community development into all levels and functions of local and national governance. It is not “elevation”, but “integration” that is needed. The paper concludes with the notion to bring back the scientists in community development and realign the politicians, bureaucrats, charities, and other stakeholders into mainstreaming community development for sustainable national development.

Introduction

Staying in the forefront of scientific developments is hard work, as it is the nature of all sciences to continuously explore and develop the current levels of knowledge further. This also counts for the discipline of community development. Community development thinking and practices also evolved over the years to the

extent that you can write a masters or doctoral thesis on the “development” of community development (Cornwell, 1986).

The purpose of this article is not to give a quick fix on how to elevate community to the level of being a key driver for sustainable development. For that each situation, government composition, socio-economic circumstances, etc., is simply too unique, especially where

humans are involved. The article is developed around six paradigm shifts, specifically chosen to stimulate a community development paradigm shift, based upon some of the latest scientifically based thinking within the parameters of the theme under discussion.

Community development is probably one of the most used and abused terms in the vocabulary of politicians and international donor agencies in under developed, developing and even developed countries. The latter mainly because the concept is often woven into all forms of international financial aid to under developed and developing countries to win over voters for domestic political purposes. Geoghegan and Powell (2009) even equate the notion of community development with a form of modern discursive Agora, where citizens and politicians share and debate this common interest. Also, the origin of the *community development* concept seems to be as amorphous as its content. Various researchers tried to pin down the origin of the concept in historical context, usually taking the concept back to a government decision or policy statements in a specific country to improve the plight of the poor or unacceptable living conditions of some or other identifiable community or group of people, originally associated with some or other educational programme (Wass, 1972; Bohan, 2009; Garkovich in Robinson & Green, 2011). In search of some order in the chaos in the community development arena, Cornwell (1968) focused on the various definitions associated with the concept and concluded that community development is rather a metaphor and the concept was not originally formulated with the aim to be used as a scientific concept that could withstand the scrutiny of scientific rigor (Cornwell 1968) which could make community development less of an art and more of a science, with proper defined inputs that could lead to more predictable outcomes. If we do not know what you did wrong, how will we know what you did right? But, the contrary also holds true. One of the purposes of this presentation is to demystify the concept of community development by introducing the reader to you a theoretical paradigm that can possibly assist to understand why some development projects are successful and sustainable, and others not.

Where Do We Come From?

Community development theory and practice has come a long way and has become more mature over the years. Theorists and practitioners moved through various theoretical paradigms starting with the evolutionary paradigm of Spencer, through the conflict and functionalist theoretical paradigms to the advent of the complexity theory paradigm in a the post-modern 21st century. Each of these phases of development thinking contributed a unique focus on the theme and was integrated into a new set of knowledge in its own unique way into a next phase. However, all of the mentioned community development theoretical approaches were based upon macro theories and when applied in meso- and micro-environments, are continuously confronted with exceptions to the rule. In short, it provides little help in the practical application of community development projects, other than explaining the expected. The result of this was that community development became closely associated with charity organisations and political parties that want to win over votes by promising voters in certain communities/constituencies, assistance to get them out of their misery. No wonder community development projects are mostly associated with the plight of the poor. This understated demand of performance in development projects contributed mainly to the flawed association of community development projects with the typical input-output behaviouristic models. This idea was the result of governments and other funding agencies, demanding visible outcomes for money spent on community development projects. This background tainted the concept of community development to such an extent that it has become one of the most exploited concepts by the target communities in demanding unrealistic services and facilities, as well as political and government institutions of whom one of the primary functions is to create safe and healthy communal environment. This paradigm of thinking also signalled the beginning of projects that were merely social engineering exercises, where outsiders would decide what is best for a community and governments and funding agencies were promised that certain outcomes would be reached.

This era was short lived and during the nineties, the absence of concrete community development results and the reasons for the failures formed the central debate among community development theorists and recognition started to be given to the complexity of the process and with that, comfort of a guarantee that positive outcomes of development projects were simply not as possible as it was believed before.

Complexity Theory The Answer?

The result of this debate was that since the nineties, complexity theory has gained ground to the level that it is today considered by some scientists to be the dominant theoretical approach in the sciences. That the world around us consists of an ever-increasing complex system of multiple levels of interactions simply seems to be true. In fact, the more we know, the more confused we become. This in a nutshell is the essence of the Complexity theory paradigm. The reality is that community development is nothing short of that. Community development has outgrown its infancy, and in doing so, the complexity of the phenomenon dawned upon us. We are confronted with various development models of what claim to deliver the goods, different approaches that claim to be successful, up to the point that someone wrote an article on under the title: "A non-theory of community development". Existing models have become more refined and each author is just adding more boxes and arrows, just to increase the complexity of the model. We seem to be at the point that the more complex a model is, the more scientific it must be.

Complexity theory is typically associated with the holistic approach. The underlying theme of both focuses on the chaotic complexity and incompleteness of the situation, but always concludes by arguing that here is order in the chaos. Therefore, in this complex chaotic world, we all operate on the various edges of this chaos. However, this does not take us far when it comes to community development. It makes systematic planning towards an end goal merely impossible. But, the complexity of the reality is something that cannot be ignored.

With the advent of complexity/chaos theory in community development thinking, the theoretical basis thereof deteriorated to the level of "anything goes" as long as it is for the better, or as long as it works. That is typically a non-theory of community development. Clearly this makes little contribution to the scientific status of community development practitioners, in which case success of community development projects often boils down to individual personality factors, circumstances, experience of the people involved and/or a great deal of luck.

During this phase in the history of theory development, the notion seems to have developed that, the more complex and the more variables are built into the model, the more "scientific" it must be. This is of course true, but the result of this notion was that a plethora of community development models saw the light of which all claim to have that magic ingredient to guarantee a successful outcome. If this claim is was true, why do we still see so few success stories? It seems that instead of formulating a proper theory, theorists and practitioners came up with words, words, and more words.....

- The community must decide ...
- Let the people speak ...
- Participatory development ...
- Bottom-up approach ...
- Grassroots development ...
- Sustainable development ...
- Empowerment ...
- Capacity building ...
- Holistic development ...

Social Engineering Versus Social Development

The layperson is very susceptible for the concept of social engineering. It creates the impression that anything is possible, and based upon the principle of the typical Skinnerian and Pavlovian input-output model of behavioural change. If community development takes the approach of social engineering, it is to be expected that some or other time the target population will reject it. The stage where it is "socially internalised" into the community will

simply never be reached. And, if the latter stage is not reached, we are bound into the typical "engineers quick fix" of simply putting nuts and bolts together in order to build houses, instead of putting hearts and souls together to create communities. It is the scientist's responsibility to clearly explain what scientific research can offer to the theme of community development, as well as the limitations thereof. To be able to respond to this need, six paradigm shifts are needed.

Paradigm shift 1: Do not focus on complexity, focus on order

With the focus on the current theoretical paradigm active in community development thinking, the quest is for the first paradigm switch in search of more order in community development. If your focus is on complexity, the result is probably that any solution for a problem is probably unachievable. This takes the community development practitioner nowhere, as the main focus will always be on this overwhelming complexity which remains the undisputable reality.

However, there is a solution. If one would focus on the "order" in the chaos/complexity, it simplifies the process and the search for solutions look totally different and suddenly solutions become achievable. That will only happen if you move your focus away from the ever-growing chaotic detail, and focus on the growing simplicity of the overarching trends. It is this paradigm switch that made it possible to visualise the simplicity of the underlying currents captured in the **basic needs theory** for community development. No wonder that this theoretical approach claims to be the only community development theory that shows the much needed potential to predict possible outcomes.

Characteristics of A Good Theory

Though various authors attempted to, or claim that they use some or other community development theory as point of departure, almost without exception they are all merely different *approaches* or techniques used in community

development projects, which vary from a focus on education, economy, governance, health facilities to empowerment or capacity building as the vehicle to trigger the desired and anticipated development outcome (Jimu & Munyaka, 2008; Craig, Popple & Shaw, 2008; Zeuli & Radel 2005; Jimu, 2008; Ledwith, 2007). These different successive approaches are also well documented by Smith and confirm the notion of successive approaches in the absence of a proper community development theory (Smith, 2013). Earlier efforts to give community development some sort of scientific base have seen theorists mainly used or borrowed elements from existing macro societal theories (Tamas, 2000), whilst other community development practitioners integrated some theoretical elements from various other disciplines such as psychology, social work, public administration, human ecology, to name but a few, to claim some credibility to their development actions and/or decisions. Still, the success stories are few and when development projects were successful, we did not really know why, and when they were unsuccessful, we also did not really know why.

It is against this background that it is postulated that the reason why there are so few successful community development projects, being that there is no proper community development theory that has the possibility to predict an outcome (Cornwell, 1986:219). The purpose of this article is to take community development beyond the current practice of selecting and applying different community development approaches and experiences, often derived from "lessons learnt" and "best practices", to a common underlying theory that would reflect the important criterion of prediction, that would elevate the community development debate to the level of a proper theoretical discourse (Mouton & Marais, 1996:44).

What Makes a Good Theory?

The most important characteristics of typologies, models, and theories and the relationship between them, are summarised in the following schema, which depicts the various functions with the distinguishing function of a typology, model, theory, and a law (see figure 1).

TYOLOGY	MODEL	THEORY	LAW*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classifying • Categorising 	Classifying Categorising	Classifying Categorising	Classifying Categorising
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heuristic • Discovering 	Heuristic Discovering	Heuristic Discovering
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanatory • Prediction 	Explanatory Prediction

Figure 1: Characteristics of different levels of theorising
Mouton, 1998 (*adapted by Schutte)

For the purposes of this article, it is suffice to mention that in addition to the classifying and heuristic functions of typologies and models, theories may be distinguished on the basis that they are also aimed at explaining and predicting phenomena or events.

What is it that constitutes a proper scientific theory?

Let us be clear on this. Experience alone is no science, as one cannot generate scientific knowledge or arguments that are not embedded in a sound theory. But, it is also to be acknowledged that all theories are not necessarily accepted as good theories, because we sometimes lack proper researched information to confirm or reject the theory. The following criteria could assist in distinguishing between a good and bad theory.

A good theory;

- is the apex of one or more well conceptualised and related definition(s),
- is one that withstood the times and is usually simple,
- gives satisfactory explanations most of the time,
- is not closed, but can accommodate, explain and contribute with a fair amount of certainty to a variety of other models and typologies,

- is open enough, but at the same time closed enough to be predictive, and
- often also prescribes an associated measuring technique.

It is against the above criteria of a good theory that the **basic needs theory** for community development is proposed as the only real community development theory.

Paradigm shift 2: When is something experienced as a problem?

Why do people in a community consider some issues as problems and others not? The logic answer to this question is that something is considered to be a problem in a community, if the solution to overcome this problem lies outside their locus of control. That is, they do not have the means or access to a solution for the problem as perceived by them. Without exception, underdeveloped communities do not host the capacity within, nor the means or the networking to access solutions for their basic problems. Therefore, community development is embedded in the process to relief the community from those problems that are beyond their locus of control. As development is defined as "putting

people in a position to shift their own goals" the basic needs dissolution argues that satisfying basic needs within a specific time and space realm, will give rise to the development of a new set of ("higher level") basic needs. This is a process that will repeat itself, working in an upward cyclical helix (see figure 2). The development cycle will simply get stuck when there are still basic needs that hinder them to move on to "higher levels" of achievement and/or self-esteem that lies beyond their locus of control. This development cyclical helix can only be encouraged by the continuous satisfaction of the "lower levels" of needs (basic needs) as perceived by the community. Therefore, it is expected that as the target community moves up the cyclical helix of development, less issues (of a primary nature) will remain that are beyond their locus of control, and through this, the community gets more control over their living context.



Figure 2: Development cyclical helix

Too Early is Just as Bad as Too Late

In developing a theory, the conceptualisation of the relevant key concepts, namely **community** and **development**, is imperative. It is clear from the literature that a sense of belonging and a common destiny, in which the individual has rediscovered his own worth, is just as much part of the concept of community, as the physical link to a geographically identifiable area. This dimension of the community concept has an obvious subjective element that manifests itself in a complex relationship of perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours (Hillary, 1955). In this sense one feels a subjective sense of belonging

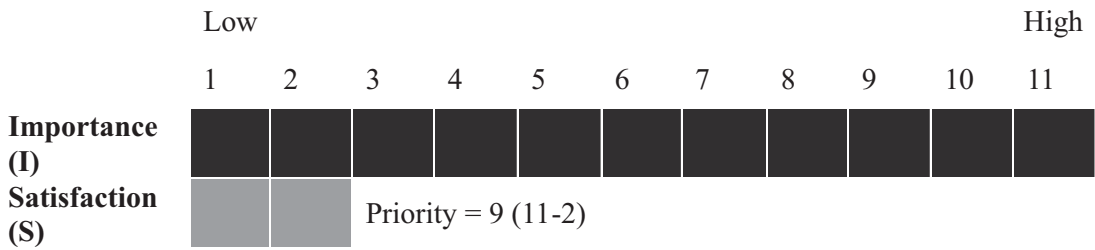
to a particular community that manifests in expressions of a sense of bonding, such as *this is my home, I am proud of my community or all my friends are in this community* (Schutte, 2015). If development is seen as a form of change, development must be seen on a continuum ranging from good to bad. When used in the realm of community development, we naturally refer to something good. Therefore, the definition of community development laying the foundation for the basic needs theory is *the gradual positive change among people within a given geographical area towards self-determined ideals with minimal outside interference. In short, to put people in a position to move their own goals* (Schutte, 2015).

Determining a Basic Need

Traditionally, efforts to determine the needs of communities tend to be merely based on the order of preference of respondents, in terms of the perceived importance of a need or set of needs. Various innovative techniques are used for this, but they all have the same purpose, namely to weigh the importance or seriousness of one of the needs up against another. In practice, results obtained in this way have often proved to cause more problems than they solve, particularly in lower socioeconomic status communities. Such communities usually have a pressing need for whatever one may care to mention and to rank needs in some order of importance is often simply impossible, simply because they have nothing.

To surmount this problem, the basic needs theory introduces the concept of priority to surmount this problem. In determining the priority of a need, respondents are not asked to rank their needs in order of importance, but by relating respondents' perception of the importance of a given need with their current level of satisfaction vis-à-vis that same need in order to reveal the relative tolerance with the current situation regarding the mentioned need (see figure 3).

Issue A: High importance and low satisfaction: Priority high.



Issue B: High importance but relative high satisfaction: Priority lower.

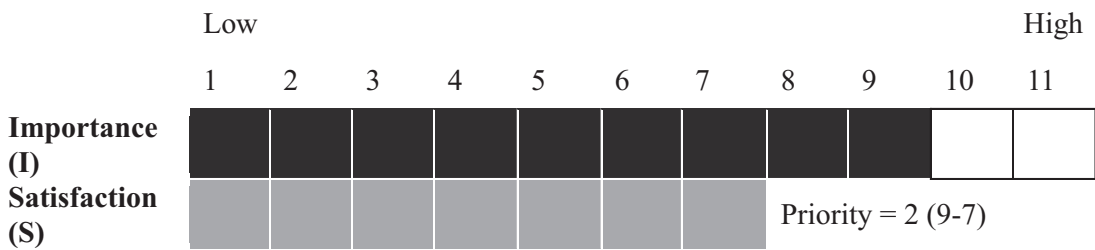


Figure 3: Determining the Priority of a need

As a result of this prioritisation technique, respondents are not asked to rank their needs, because a need which community members regard as very important, whilst at the same time being quite satisfied with the current state of affairs regarding that same need, will take in a lower position on the prioritisation list than one sharing the same level of importance whilst the current status is regarded as being highly unsatisfactory.

Managing Community Development in a Country

It is against this backdrop that it is needed to take the problem of managing community development on a bigger scale, such as in a country, which in turn demands further paradigm shifts.

Paradigm shift 3: There is no “one size fits all”.

Embrace diversity. Of one thing any person involved in community development projects is sure, there is no “one size fits all”, or a single “best practice project” that can be applied to all

community development projects or programmes. From a basic needs perspective, the diversity and unique complexity of circumstances in each community, simply does not render the magic of a reusable single best practice. Though, it is accepted that the combined experience of community development practitioners in various settings should not be underestimated. Government departments also often underestimate the level of knowledge that is accumulated in the various departments. This wealth of knowledge could be in the form of human capacity, as well as in real world experience of development projects among staff, or the wealth of knowledge collecting dust in the files and drawers of government offices, waiting to be unlocked. The problem is that everybody is not operating from the same page. Each of us does have some part of the solution in how to improve the quality of life in our communities. Therefore, what needs to be done is to merely stimulate the wealth of knowledge brought together, and to realign this wealth of knowledge to take this amorphous concept called community development to the level of a national strategy through creatively applying

our minds to do what the different government departments currently do, but just better.

Paradigm shift 4: Accept silos.

The above problem of isolated and unlocked information, originates in the well-known concept of “silo” mentality that often exists in organisations. The definition of silo mentality is a mind-set that occurs in organisations, which is inward looking and resists sharing information and resources with other people or departments within the organization (Perception Dynamics).

There is no “cheap answer” to the problem. But, often one finds that management consultants to larger organisations or government departments come to this “new” conclusion that the “silo” management and/or thinking in the institution under investigation should be dismantled. This is also a truth that keeps many management consultants alive, simply because silo's in organisations will always be there in one form or another. Silo thinking/management is simply deeply engrained in the human nature. This is what everyone naturally does – protect our turf or to organise knowledge to make life easier for oneself, or to be one step ahead of colleagues. This is simply done by always keeping something up your sleeve. This is in essence what drives silo behaviour. Part of the solution to this problem is simply to make peace with it! Rather spend your energy in managing the silos, or manage around it.

If we accept this reality, the question remains how do you elevate community development to the position as a key driver to the level of a national sustainable development programme? In other words, how do we counter silo thinking in favour of a bigger overarching cause? The answer lies in mainstreaming. If you mainstream is theme, it automatically infiltrates into, and taps into information across departments, and silos in departments.

Paradigm shift 5: Community development became dehumanised

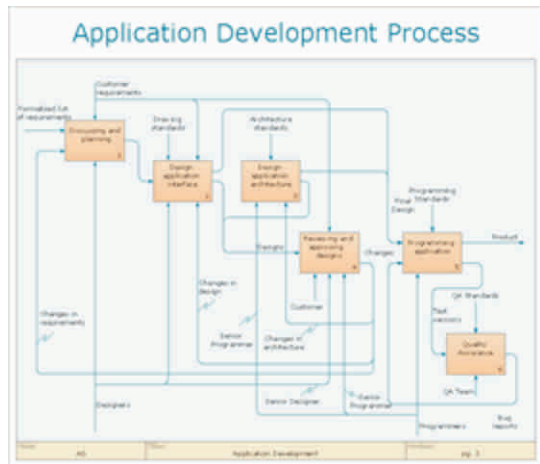
We have to put the “human” back in community development projects. In elevating community development to the level of a national strategy, you run the risk of “over planning”. Now, is that

possible? The following are two examples where community development planning became so “dehumanised” that it probably only developed into a paper exercise with detail that in the end, becomes irrelevant, but true to the complexity paradigm (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Example of confusing and mystifying and development diagrams



Source: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2004april/tt3.php>



Source: <http://www.conceptdraw.com/samples/business-process-diagrams>

The above diagrams are examples of efforts in trying to dismantle the complexity of the community development process, and in doing so, further mystify it. In nearly every arrow or box lies the possibility of a masters or doctoral thesis. This is the clinical presentation of the process that dehumanises (as mentioned above) the community development process. But, when one puts a human in each of the boxes, it suddenly looks different. All management

structures work with humans. In short, there is an **individual** in every box an arrow. And to make it more complex, there is probably a **group of individuals** in there! Often one observes various sustainable development schematic models and structures that are put in place, but they seem to be typical clinical theoretical based input-output, or complexity theory models, that only look good pinned against an office wall and in planning reports for stakeholders.

Paradigm shift 6: Bigger is not necessarily better

The former five paradigm shifts culminate in the notion that the answer does not necessarily lie in "bigger and better". It is not the biggest departments that are the most influential in governments and corporate institutions. The answer is not to elevate, but to penetrate. What is needed is not a process designed to elevate community development to a higher level, but rather to look into possible ways of how to integrate/penetrate community development into all levels and departments of governance/management. This is what happens in successful national community development strategies all over the world. All government departments go ahead with doing what their specialised functions are, but with an additional driver is embedded in their actions, namely to what they have to do, but with community development as an embedded theme. One might think that this is easier said than done, but the key ingredient here is information of a specific quality, namely "unfiltered" information. In order to do this, information regarding needs in the different communities that is "unfiltered" and that is still to be tailor made by the different specialised role players in i.e. service delivery departments, is needed. The nature of such unfiltered information shows the following characteristics.

1. Primary information that is unfiltered and not yet interpreted and that could be made available for every discipline (engineers and social workers alike) or specific

- development interest in a community.
2. Information that can be presented in such a way as to be accessible for further interpretation and implementation by specialists from diverse backgrounds.
3. Information that goes beyond the "slogans" people use to express their needs.
4. Information that reflects needs that were not expressed as relative to another needs.
5. Shows those issues that negatively impacts people's lives at this point in time.
6. Information that describes those issues that lie outside the people's locus of control.
7. Information that entails qualitative as well as quantitative characteristics.
8. Information that gives a true reflection of people's needs in the community by the target community themselves.

This is the type of information that is generated by the basic needs theory and Priority Index data collection technique.

In an effort to put community development in its rightful place in governance, there seems to be a general need to bring back the scientists. Experience alone is not science. But, it is when experience is systematically documented, processed and subjected to the rigor of the scientific method that experience becomes factual knowledge. For too long, philanthropists, politicians, and other stakeholders have driven community development in the absence of the scientists. It is time to call on the scientists to prove their worth.

The basic needs theory and measuring technique seems to be able to take community development to the next level of scientific conduct that will pass the test of scientific rigor. Governments just have to realign the politicians, bureaucrats, charities, and other stakeholders into mainstreaming community development for sustainable national development. Arguing from a basic needs theoretical paradigm, the current commonly used complexity theory approach to deal with community development is paralysing community development nearly to the point of impossibility. The managerial quest should be to embed community development into the

“DNA” of good governance of all departments and relevant stakeholders. For this a paradigm shift from the current thinking about community development is needed. What is needed is to focus on the “order in the chaos” to create the biggest possible overlap amongst the (i) government and other stakeholders, as well as the (ii) members of the community towards what community development really entails. Part of the solution is to move away from this already “tainted” concept, “community development”, and rather speak of improving people's “quality of life”. It seems that the mentioned points of departure of the basic needs theory, rather indicates towards a better description of what community development really is, namely improving the quality of life of the people in a target community. Addressing the basic needs as perceived by the community itself, points exactly to that, namely, improving their quality of life by assisting the community to bring the current problems they are confronted with, within their locus of control. The concept of quality of life also accommodates the relativity of the concept across communities and cultures. Therefore, it is also important that developing a community development theory should free itself from its amorphous origins and be more exact in what it really purports to be, namely, improving people's quality of life.

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