

# Community Work :

Theories, Experiences & Challenges



Editors  
Kalpana Goel, Venkat Pulla, Abraham P. Francis



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Edited By: Kalpana Goel, Venkat Pulla, Abraham P. Francis

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## Introduction

### **What is this book about?**

This book revisits community development especially questioning the meaning of the term community in the changing global and international context. The nature and dynamics of what constitutes community are changing to suit the needs of people living in a technologically advanced nature of life. Communities that were based on face-to-face interactions, sense of belonging and 'we' feelings are being replaced or overtaken by virtual communities. What is seen is that face-to-face human interaction is being minimised by technologically advanced ways of communicating, such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype and various other such mechanisms that have traversed physical boundaries and made human interaction possible. This new development has also been instrumental in generating new ideologies, new ways of working with people and addressing human causes.

We are well aware of the importance and applicability of such an approach in the community development perspective. However, the question before the social work fraternity is how much it values and can replace face-to-face interaction. The book attempts to build on the existing knowledge base on community work and community development and aims to expand our thinking on community development processes in the current context of changing globalised society. The authors in the book primarily drew from their global research and practice experiences in the community development field across South Asia, Australia and elsewhere.

Social workers/community workers are mandated to work with the disadvantaged, marginalised and oppressed in the society and are directed by the professional code of ethics to uplift human rights and justice to all. The key imperative in social work practice thus becomes adopting such approaches that embraced practices which uphold people's rights. The book expands on theoretical understandings of community, community development and illustrates practice approaches such as safety net, micro-finance, self-help, Ubuntu approaches that have wider application to different sectors such as education, economy, health and human settlement.

Bringing together academicians in social work and practitioners who have worked with communities from Australia, India, Africa, Malaysia, this volume is a must-read for academics, and students who are studying human services, including social work, community service, community development, and practitioners.

The book delivers practical advice and shares strategies that are based on the real-life experience of working with communities across the nations. It gives breadth and depth of knowledge on community development theory, practice principles, values and illustrates implications for practice based on research and practice experiences that has wider applicability. All the chapters discuss the community development approach/method as a strategy to bring about change in the society. Following a preliminary discussion by Kalpana Goel of the meanings of community and community development, all the chapters discuss the community development approach/method as a strategy to bring about change in the society.

James Mugisha encounters changes in the structural and institutional fabrics of society as a result of globalisation through the micro-finance institution and illustrates how this has been used as a tool to meet community needs for those who are marginalised due to the effects of globalisation.

Kalpana Goel in her chapter examines the role community-based organisations play in fostering a socially inclusive society based on the principles of community development. The author examines community development theory as a method of social work practice in working with immigrant communities.

Another case of effectiveness of community development as a strategy is illustrated by Abraham Francis who has modelled safety net groups as a user-friendly tool for enhancing community building and community support for people having mental health problems.

Bala Raju Nikku's chapter discusses how the social work profession is challenged in the current changing environment that is affected by forces operational at the global level. Through the illustration of community development work in South Asian countries, his paper addresses two important questions: that is how to organise communities in a turbulent environment and how to prepare social work students as effective practitioners who are equipped with knowledge and skills required to work with communities in this changing environment.

Narayan Gopalkrishnan presents a theoretical framework for community development practitioners who are in an advantageous position to influence the adverse impact of globalisation on communities.

Fredrik Velandar and Andreia Schineanu postulate a culturally secure practice framework to work with Indigenous communities. They illustrate aspects of wise practice and culturally secure community development practice by using a case study of Norseman Aboriginal Community in Australia.

Heather Percey and Peter Orpin have explored community development processes in a rural context. Through a grounded theory study, theoretical insights

have been developed modelling the community processes associated with rural community development. Based on differing aetiologies, the model classifies three types of community: feature, interest and cause based.

The paper by Ndungi Wa Mungai presents the Ubuntu philosophy based on African cultures and philosophy and emphasises that our destiny is both as a collective as well as individuals. This approach helps to understand the importance of extended families diaspora communities as well as those in Africa. It also helps to explain the problems encountered by such communities when they migrate to societies with more individualistic ethics.

Bharath Bhushan Mamidi and Radha R. Chada, on the basis of a case study discuss how to organise the Street vendors utilising community organisation methods and the principles of social work and community development.

Joy Penman discusses how to build community capacity through health education at the Grassroots. The University of South Australia at Whyalla has been involved in various community engagements, including health education sessions, which enable community members to build their self-management capacity and increase the human capital of the community. These educational sessions are conducted by staff and invited guest speakers. Joy Penman is an academic and also health director of a local church congregation and this chapter is based on her reflections.

Subhasis Bhadra and Venkat Pulla, in their reflecting on Tsunami present a community development perspective of the various phases of the disaster management cycle focusing on relief, rehabilitation, rebuilding and finally disaster preparedness that attempts to strengthen resilience at individual and community levels. The authors have drawn on their previous work relating to the 2004 Tsunami while explaining the various concepts.

Anne Riggs and Venkat Pulla reflect on arts and social work practices in the field of community work and discuss several shared concerns regarding development options for individuals and communities. While the profession of social work provides coping, resilience and active hope, forms of art would assist in regenerating purpose, rejuvenating life processes and uplifting the affective domain of our client systems.

Abraham Francis, Venkat Pulla and Kalpana Goel in their paper review perspectives currently available for health promotion in social work in relation to mental health. The authors emphasise the importance of strength-based community development perspectives in mental health practice and an attempt is made to put forward an integrated model for addressing mental health issues in a community context. The model looks at highlighting the need for developing and sustaining community spirit and promoting resilience in communities.

Abraham Francis and Venkat Pulla finally in the last chapter attempt to revisit these aspects, namely, globalisation and uncertainty, and their impact on communities.

Our attempt here was to briefly review the processes and challenges facing communities in contemporary society. Along with our colleagues in this collection we have examined the changing concepts of community, its elements and function that has relevance for the community development perspective. How the community development perspective can be utilised to solve some of the crises of 21<sup>st</sup> century such as the water crisis, food insecurity, unsustainable of food-growing practices, accessing issues and rights of the poor and marginalised require attention. We hope you find the readings here useful.

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## **Acknowledgements**

It is with a great sense of hope; excitement and accomplishment that we would like to present this book to the readers, especially the social work students, human service workers academics and researchers.

A scholarly work is only possible with the zeal, initiative and enthusiasm of researchers and practitioners who are open to share their insights and learned experiences with a community of people interested in the subject matter. The contributors of this volume are people who had spent significant time of their lives in developing insights into issues faced by the communities with whom they have been associated, lived, spoken and listened to. It is their experiences and reflections of what works in working with communities. As the editors of this volume, we owe our gratitude to God who blessed us with some fantastic colleagues and friends to work on this project. We are also indebted to earlier researchers and practitioners who provided valuable theoretical and practical wisdom which has enriched and guided work of many of us who have built further knowledge and suggested frameworks that may be applicable in other parts of the world.

Kalpna Goel wishes to thank her work colleagues who have been inspirational and provided support and encouragement to the editorial team. Kalpna would especially like to thank those who spared their time in the peer reviewing process and that helped the editors to maintain scholarly rigor in this endeavor. Kalpna wishes to convey her heartfelt thanks to both co-editors of this book Dr. Venkat Pulla and Dr. Abraham Francis who worked relentlessly to accomplish the goal of compilation, reviewing chapters and editing of this volume.

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## **Dedication**

*'I would like to dedicate this book to my late parents Rajendra Prasad Agarwal and Maya Rani Agarwal; whose nurturing and blessings have prepared me as a person with humanistic values and aspirations to move forward'*

**- Kalpana Goel**

*'To Srinivas Arka, Philosopher and spiritual mentor and to my wife Nisha Rao who lets me follow my heart in pursuing writing'*

**- Venkat Pulla**

*'To my loving wife Mini, children Abhijith and Alka, the source of my strength and the inspiration for all that I do'*

**- Abraham P. Francis**

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# Understanding Community and Community Development

Kalpana Goel\*

## Abstract

This chapter delineates what is meant by the term 'community' in community development practice. Is the meaning changing in the context of development taking place in the socio-political and technological areas or is it some aspects of community functioning that are important in community development practice? Thus, the nature of community and its function towards meeting goals of human society has been explored.

Social workers work with communities at different levels ranging from micro to mezzo and macro level. Their processes in community development are guided by values and principles based on human rights, social and ecological justice. These are at the core of community development practice. While applying these values and principles and working at the grassroots level, social workers face dominant societal views and power structures that operate at local, regional, national and even international levels. Thus it is imperative to revisit the knowledge and skills a social worker needs to have in the field of community development.

**Key words:** community, community development, community development practice

## Defining the Concept of Community

The earlier and most commonly held meaning of 'community' refers to people living in a place who have face-to-face contact with each other. Based on this assertion Tönnies (1955) classified community as 'Gemeinschaft' to refer to pre-industrial social formation where face-to-face contact was possible in rural and tribal society. With changes in industrialised society, a new society emerged that was more akin to impersonal contact amongst its people. People related with each in formal ways and life was contractual. Tönnies denoted this with the term 'Gesellschaft'. This conceptualisation served the purpose of defining and conceptualising community in earlier days; however, such a tight compartmentalisation changed over time as community crossed physical boundaries of place and people could connect with each other by using technologies and still fulfil most of the functions of the community. A critique undertaken by Bhattacharya (2004, p. 11) also points out that a place-based conceptualisation of community

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itself is not sufficient to conceptualise community development practice for three important reasons. Firstly, it refers to 'a neighbourhood, a small town, or a village... regardless of the absences of any cohesion in it'. Secondly, it disguises various differences and shared interests that transcend boundaries of place and unite people together to act. This is also regarded as Durkheim's 'organic solidarity' and Tönnies' 'Gesellschaft'. Thirdly, place-based conceptualisation of the community 'fails to take into account the radical social change that is brought by modernity' (Bhattacharya, 2004, p. 11).

Defining community in the context of community development requires a broadening of definition that includes both place-based, interest-based and other forms of new and emerging communities, for example, web community, Facebook or other social media community and online groups that traverse physical boundaries and relate with unknown people in diverse locations.

This can also be explained by looking at different theoretical explanations about what constitutes community. Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan (2012, p. 294) cite Luloff and Krannich (2002) who have used three theoretical approaches – human ecology, systems theory and field theory – to explain what constitutes community.

The theory of human ecology explains 'community as the structure of relationships through which a localised population meets its daily requirements' (Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan (2012, p. 294). It points out its key role of providing support to its members for its survival by forming relationship of care. Systems theory identifies community as the amalgamation of different units or sub-systems that jointly work towards achievement of community goals. This theory views people as holding different roles and statuses as part of different systems closely linked with each other. The field theory describes 'social interaction as the most critical feature of community' (Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2012, p. 295). Thus these theories contribute in explaining the community as a structure of relationship whose members are inter-related and function through social interaction. Community relationship could be based on shared identity that is derived from place, ethnicity, culture, interest or ideology. This identity helps bring solidarity amongst people, what Durkheim (1960, as cited in Kenny, 2011a, p. 46) identified as 'mechanical' and 'organic solidarity'. The distinction between these two types of solidarity is regarded as a difference due to commonality of experience for the former and divergence of experience for the latter type of solidarity. This concept is useful in understanding community as an entity where people share identity that brings solidarity in relationship. It helps cross physical boundaries and thus becomes relevant in understanding post-industrial and post-modern communities that have shared identity and are functional communities. Kenny (2011a, p. 47) describes two types of solidarity: thick and thin solidarity. The thick type of solidarity is

where people have 'deep [feelings] and an all-embracing relationship', such as racial or ethno-religious groups, and thin solidarity refers to relationships that are most evident in the post-modern era whereby people take membership of different organisations on the basis of identification with a profession, group or place; however, their involvement may not be as deep and all-encompassing as in thick solidarity. An example could be membership of a professional organisation, human rights group, or action groups. Nevertheless, each sort of solidarity has its place in community development work as people are entrusted with different roles and responsibilities based on their affinity and sense of ownership.

### **Elements of Community**

For communities to function and help their members to achieve their goals, compositional factors that include structural aspects and circumstances for growth (poverty, crime, housing and environment) (Chaskin, 2009, p. 32); and physical location, including both natural and built environment are important. According to Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan (2012, p. 295) these 'physical resources are important for functional, aesthetic and symbolic reasons'. If we examine the impact of physical resources on the inhabitants of a place, then it is clear that people who live in places which are deprived of resources, opportunities for growth in education, skills development, and offer limited employment opportunity, are restricted in functionality. Aesthetically, people also prefer to live in places that are pleasurable and, symbolically, physical resources strengthen the identity formation of community members (Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2012, p. 295).

This does exemplify that the quality and nature of physical resources are important and constitute an important ingredient of the community. However, different professional groups focus on different aspects of community. Physical resources are an area of possible improvement where urban planners are more likely to focus to. Social workers and social theorists are more likely to be concerned with another ingredient of the community, that is, people's relationships, networks and trust in those relationships. These things form the basis of community strengths as different stakeholders in the community (individuals and groups) bring different sets of knowledge and skills that determine existing community capacity to effect change and helps in building an empowering process that relies on existing community social capital. This can also be described in the form of various assets that make up what has been termed 'social capital' (Putnam, 1993). Putnam describes social capital as a resource that the community can draw upon to achieve common goals. A very similar conceptualisation of elements of community structure and functioning has been theorised as 'community interaction theory', initiated by Wilkinson and further developed by others (Wilkinson, 1970; 1991; Cheers & Luloff,

2001; Sharp, 2001; Carroll et al., 2006, all as cited in Taylor, Wilkinson & Cheers, 2008, p. 31). This theory points out that every community has elements of 'local society, the community field, community structures (including power networks); horizontal and vertical patterns of interaction; strong ties and weak ties and community narratives' that together promote and develop social interaction which is the essence of the community. In order for the community to achieve goals of development its members should act together in various social fields such as education, health, transport and welfare. Thus the rise of community is not possible until social fields linking together act for achievement of the common good (Taylor, Wilkinson, & Cheers, 2008, p. 34).

Understanding processes of social interaction and how different social fields/sectors link together and act together thus becomes important in a local society/community that could be geographically based, interest-based or in a virtual environment.

### **Functions of Community**

If one examines the role and importance of community in the social, economic, spiritual and political life of human beings, it is far clearer that various functions that are performed by the community have a bearing on the extent of well-being and disadvantage experienced by its members. Communities through identification and symbolic artefacts provide a sense of belongingness to their people. Human beings associate and form relationships with each other based on shared identity of place, class, race, ethnicity, cultural heritage and various other mechanisms that help form these identities. This *sense of belongingness* connects people with each other and builds social capital that is referred to as relationships based on mutuality, trust and cooperation. Although there is no certainty that people will develop trust and cooperation, a sense of belongingness opens up possibilities of establishing connections, networks and generating solidarity. This formation of social capital can be both inclusive and exclusive of marginalised and disadvantaged communities. How people can be excluded by shared identity of some members of the society can be understood by looking at three case studies in Victoria, Australia presented by Mendes (2004): Footscray Matters: excluding drug users; Port Phillip action group: excluding street prostitutes; and the Blackshirts group who went against single mothers. (See website URLs for action groups following the reference list.) These show contrasting examples of social inclusion and exclusion in policy debates in that Australian state. Kenny (2011a, p. 52) adds to our understanding of this phenomenon by pointing out that 'people identify with communities on the basis of their own concrete experiences and relations', thus paving the way for both inclusive and exclusionary practices.

It has been generally agreed that communities are formed based on people's shared interest, mutual concerns, and identity formations, and may dissipate when needs are met or tasks accomplished (Kenny, 2011a, p. 53). However, the relationships formed and associations built are channelled to work together on issues that are similar and conform to the value orientation of members. The organisations raising awareness and taking action to bring about change in policies and actions taken by public and private sector players in the socio-political and economic and environmental context could encompass many diverse issues such as the green movement, environmental degradation projects, an anti-corruption drive, the fight for land rights and gender inequalities. Such examples could be GetUp!, Avaaz, Human Rights Watch, Greenpeace, and Amnesty International. (See website URLs in reference list.)

In contemporary society, advancement in communication technology has helped in reducing distance and bringing like-minded people together, thus increasing the functionality of interest-based communities. 'Virtual communities' is one example of such communities which exist across boundaries and help in bringing people together to work closely, not only on local issues but also on matters that concern humanity globally. Virtual communities function to empower those who feel marginalised in traditional structures of community life (Blackshaw, 2010, as cited in Kenny, 2011a, p. 51). They provide an alternative to face-to-face interaction, although they could be forming thin relationships with new members in the community; however, they could also act to cement existing relationships, thus providing an opportunity to build rich community experiences. Communities thus have wider roles to play. It is not only about thinking locally, but also acting globally.

The current environment of uncertainty and exponential growth in materialism has given rise to inequalities and unjust distribution of resources for the majority of people living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, the current trend in most of the developed and developing economies is towards shifting responsibility for welfare services onto the community. Thus the community has to take more responsibility in providing support, care, financial resources, technical know-how and maintenance services to its members with minimum resources provided by the state. Thus changes in the functions of the community call for alternative ways of working with communities to support them in new functional responsibilities (Ife, 2013).

### **Community Development as an Approach of Social Work**

Community development has been identified as a core social work approach or method to work with communities who are disenfranchised, marginalised and faced with broad social issues resulting from unjust policies and planning at global, national, state and local level. The failure of neo-liberal policies and the social democratic

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# Visual and Theatre Arts and Community Development

Anne Riggs<sup>1</sup>

Venkat Pulla<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Common to community development and social work processes and art (drawing, painting, collage, sculpture) are opportunities to express emotions, thoughts, memories and ideas. Yet the recognition and nurturing of a symbiotic relationship between the two professions to build the psychosocial supports that could enhance the quality of life of our clients has not become a mainstream agenda. The arts for a long time have remained at the periphery of community development and social work processes. While the profession of social work provides coping, resilience and active hope (Pulla, 2013; Pulla & Riggs, 2013), forms of art would assist in regenerating purpose, rejuvenating life processes and uplifting the affective domain of our client systems. Arts-centred community building is inherently complex because it involves other community sectors such as social services, community development and public safety. This chapter utilises autoethnography (Chase, 2013) in its methodology, combined with critical arts-based critical inquiry (Finley, 2013).

**Key words:** Art and Social Work, Resilience Development, Artists in Community, Community Development, Empowerment

## Introduction

Arts practitioners and social work practitioners in the field of community work have several shared concerns regarding development options for individuals and communities. They do work with and see children, families and communities that are impacted by a number of variables such as absence of basic amenities, poor education, discrimination, and limited opportunities and choices. As practitioners we also see trauma, mental health and other illnesses including incidence of drug and alcohol addiction, poverty and isolation. Arts practice within the communities and community development practice is always looking for innovation, creativity and opening up so that people not only cope, survive, but come out daringly and resiliently (Pulla, 2013). When creativity is expressed, it results in positive health

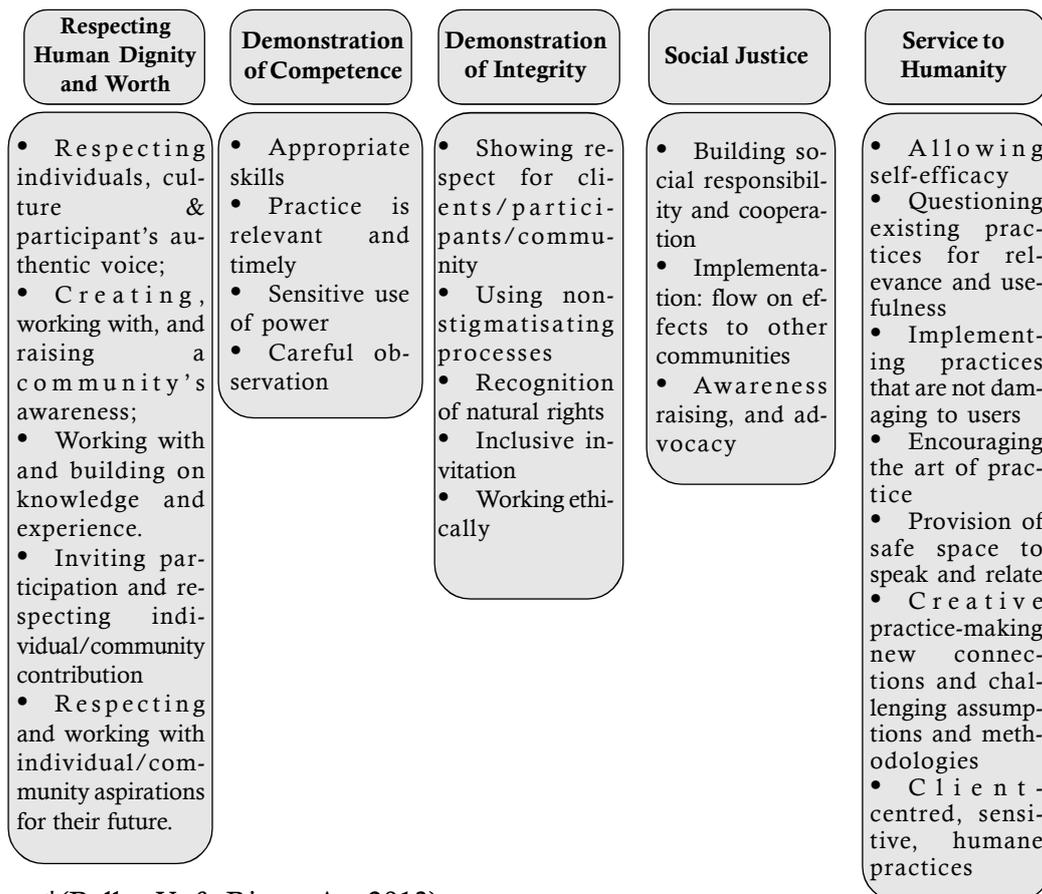
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and wellbeing, maximises human potential and allows people to lead productive lives true to their needs and interests (Dunphy, 2013). Although creative practice as part of community development has gained considerable recognition in some sectors (such as in the field of refugee settlement, trauma recovery, arts and disability) and a substantial and growing body of evidence supports its efficacy, creativity and arts-based community development practice have yet to be widely embraced in the domain of international community development as an informed practice to enhance efforts to address social issues. NGOs rarely include arts as integral to their programs (PLAN UK, 2013). The purpose of this chapter is to strengthen our argument for consideration of arts practice within the prevailing ethos of social work and community development and to strengthen existing trends of arts-led community development by inviting social and community development workers into collaborative and participatory creative practices with artists. As authors of this chapter, we believe that arts and social/community work practitioners have a shared vision for creative inputs into client solutions. In an earlier paper we have developed a Chart of Commonalities (see below) between arts practice and community development and social work values (Pulla & Riggs, 2013). One of the better known definitions of arts-based community development comes from William Cleveland (2002) who defines it as an arts-centred activity that contributes to the sustained advancement of human dignity, health and or productivity with a community. An arts-centred activity 'contributes to the sustained advancement of human dignity, health and/or productivity within a community' (p. 7). His full definition suggests the inclusion of 'creative activities that EDUCATE and INFORM us about ourselves and the world, ... INSPIRE and MOBILIZE individuals or groups, ... NURTURE and HEAL people and/or communities, ... [and] BUILD and IMPROVE community capacity and/or infrastructure' (Cleveland, 2002, p. 7).

A community arts program is characterised by its experiential and inclusive nature in which artists work with non-artists in grassroots settings, creating art in the public interest (Lowe, 2000) or in the public domain. Fun and pleasure are key components of the practice, as are the social interactions with participants. Community art is distinctive in its collaborative nature and is most effective when a skilled artist sets the stage with a framework and repertoire of skills to share, which enable rewarding, enjoyable and enriching experiences for participants. In our view, essential to good practice are the opportunities provided for participants to learn new skills and be challenged creatively. Some forms of community arts have been described as 'NGO Art' for their practices with disadvantaged social groups using activist methodology and lacking in creativity (Andersson, 2012). In contrast, in this chapter we discuss visual and performing arts in community work utilising the skills and focus of trained and practising artists.

**ART PRACTICE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SOCIAL WORK**

Communicative  
 Responds to a community need or desire  
 Resourceful  
 Problem solvers  
 Interested in the human condition and connectivity  
 Empathetic  
 Work in culture of cooperation and participation  
 Slight level of dissatisfaction - motivation and enthusiasm based on a feeling that 'things could be better'  
 A strong culture of cooperation and participation  
 Collaborative as well as able to work independently



\*(Pulla, V. & Riggs, A., 2013)

The most successful programs have been developed by artists making art, not artists doing something else (Cleveland, 2002). We begin with a case study.

### **Case Study: Artists in Community International**

Anne Riggs, the first author of this paper and Alex Pinder run visual and performing arts programs with vulnerable communities – and find this an exhilarating way to enter the life of a community and an opportunity to share their skills with those who rarely, if ever, have access to creative programs such as theirs – Artists in Community International (AICI). Riggs and Pinder formed the artists' collective in 2012 to formalise promotion of art and its benefits to education, health, community and individual or personal development that builds self confidence in young girls and children. As freelance artists, the AICI join an inviting NGO from the third world or a sponsored program of an international agency and at other times accept being guests of a foundation or an educational institution. AICI also responds to impromptu invitations. AICI has facilitated arts programs in village communities, schools, training institutions, a mental health hospital, girls' home, sex bar, with internally displaced persons, students, teachers, tribal people, the sick, the deaf, street children and child labourers, sex workers and community leaders, with children, adolescents, adults and refugees that settle in first world countries such as Australia.

AICI art and drama programs are structured to impart arts-practice knowledge, as well as provide a range of other benefits, such as helping participants develop self-esteem, express their feelings about their lives, learn and practise working co-operatively as a group, and gain skills for self-empowerment. They reach and connect with the *humanness* of those who are collectively bundled together as homogeneous groupings, such as people in developing countries (Gamble, 2012), people in distress and or people facing common concerns. Aligning with a Strengths Perspective, we build on people's aspirations, strengths, resources, and resiliency in order to engage in actions pursuing social justice and personal wellbeing (Pulla, 2012; Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2006). AICI also recognises the individual's need to express and explore the emotional effects of poverty, their feelings of exclusion and oppression, as well as other emotions and experiences.

Most participants know or have known significant hardship, prejudice and suffering; they are considered low class or low caste and therefore 'unworthy' within their own country and by their fellow citizens. Most have or are being treated poorly by others, although that is not to say they have not also been met with significant support and kindness from others. Commonly, adults struggled to house and feed their family, children had little access to education; child labour

was widespread, many women were involved in the sex trade, and many women and children lived in danger of being by trafficked (Australian Agency for International Development, 2012). Alcohol and other addictions, as well as preventable and treatable illnesses ravaged communities; medical care was a luxury most could not afford. It seemed these communities and individuals did not expect to be heard or valued and had neither expectation nor opportunity to express their individuality, creativity or opinions. AICI observed many outmoded and sometimes illegal practices not supportive of community and individual wellbeing that underpinned hardship and prejudice, some of which we describe in this chapter.

[www.artistsincommunity.me](http://www.artistsincommunity.me)



### **Collaborative Practices**

As authors of this chapter we see potential for collaborations between visual and performing artists, with social workers, community development workers and educators in a strengths-based approach to community development that could unleash the capital of creative arts practice to create stronger communities in which individuals can grow and flourish.

Artists commonly work in partnership with arts practitioners from all disciplines, such as the AICI collaboration between a visual and performing artist, each bringing their unique suite of skills to a project, and also a common set of shared skills such as setting up projects and working with communities. Amongst the benefits and joys of collaboration is the new space that opens as our individual skills meet to enable something in the other artist and for a new process and creative journey to evolve. In the authors' experience this meeting has been particularly useful in creat-

ing new arts work around shared themes, such as looking at and working with the body with young adults in processes that include observational exercises, physical movements, as well as drawing, sculpture and or painting in the creation of a new work (see figure below) and changing the energy of the groups as performing artists and community development workers.



Arts practice has the highest potential to regenerate communities when run by artists in collaboration with effective community/social workers and deployed as part of a wider program of development (Pulla & Riggs, 2013). The potential exists at multiple levels for the arts to impact community/social work by infusing reflective, critical, and ethical inquiry and as a means of expression and social activism (Arts and Social Work Research Initiative, 2007).

### **Wellbeing and Human Potential**

Internationally widely accepted concepts of wellbeing include social inclusion, eliminating oppression and violence, increasing investment and improvements in health, education and social supports. Manfred Max Neef (1991) compiled a list of needs that he considered basic to all civilisations and cultures and which provides guidance towards naming the elements necessary for human wellbeing. This list includes: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity, and freedom. In *Human Scale Development*, 'wellbeing' describes qualities of being, things one should have, abilities or actions one could take, as well as relationships or interactions (Max Neef, 1991). While achieving a sense of wellbeing is an aspirational goal, reaching full potential is a greater and more challenging one. Community development, including social work, is concerned with 'putting people at the centre of development ... about assisting people to release their potential, increasing their choices' to enjoy the freedom to lead lives they value (UNDP, 2010, cited in Gamble, 2012, p. 1). For a community to be 'functioning well' in social work terms as well as in family situations can mean a renewal of the community or even a rediscovery of the community and its innate strengths. Thus utilising Strengths-Based Practices our work can concentrate on the inherent strengths of individuals, families groups and organisations and assist us in deploying people's personal strengths to aid their recovery and empowerment (Pulla, 2012). Commu-

nity development approaches that empower alternatives to traditional methods with individuals, groups or communities allow us to refrain from using crippling, labelling and stigmatised language. A strengths-based approach in arts and community development practice offers opportunities to build and foster hope from within by focusing and working with precedent successes (Pulla, 2012).

### **Community Development**

Artists and social workers and community development workers perform with intense commitment enhancing individual and community wellbeing and facilitate reaching their respective full potential. Biography, drama, philosophy, joy and suffering can be the backdrop to both professions, but we speak different languages and so, of course, do our participants and clients (Graybeal, 2007). Within community development there can be a tendency to look for easy ways, the 'one size fits all' response, and that is the antithesis of arts practice. Graybeal (2007) argues that the science and arts aspects of social work must do more than co-exist in order for the (social work) profession to reap the full benefits of either. It must remain open to the challenges that the arts bring, the capacity of the arts to disrupt as well as add to knowledge and practice (Damianakis, 2007). Acknowledging the artistic dimension of the profession can enrich and expand the scope of enquiry; even how a problem is defined may, according to Graybeal (2007), be one of the most creative parts of practising social workers. If problems, aspirations and concerns are met with innovation, solutions that have a positive impact can be found. A nurturing creative program opens space and opportunity to explore, and develop techniques for investigation and reflection, upon their world as it is, as it has been, and how it might be in the future, enabling communities to grow in ways impossible through other means. However, creativity can also be hindered. The question of how to reach human potential is inextricably linked to the question of what may be preventing it. The authors are concerned over the inadequacy of both the theoretical and practical framework that drives development today as it does not recognise that humans flourish and can meet their potential when creativity and arts are part of their lives. Schools that encourage creative thinking in their students, organisations that inspire their members to be innovative, and opportunities for individuals to explore new ideas are all required. Each of the AICI arts projects has a unique genesis, but common to all is the exchange and consultation with community leaders. We rely on at least one person in a leadership position to collaborate with us to enable the arts program. Our project partners in our visits abroad were teachers, community development workers and leaders and doctors.

From art and community development contexts we think of culture as a living organism, rather like yeast or a sourdough culture, bubbling up with life and the

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# **Safety-Net Groups: An Approach to Community Development Practice**

**Abraham P. Francis<sup>1</sup>**

**Ms Ines Zuchowski<sup>2</sup>**

## **Abstract**

Community development is an important strategy to achieve change and develop communities. It can be a vehicle for community members to take charge of the development of their community by working together collectively. This chapter explores how the formation of Safety-Net Groups in communities can become the means and outcome of community development in rural communities. The process of formation of such groups facilitates the development of social cohesion, community belonging and social capital. The groups themselves provide a safety-net to people who are experiencing social isolation and deprivation.

This paper is based on both field practice and teaching community development subjects at an Australian university. Practice observations and reflections suggest that people affiliate and associate with various groups based on their need and interest. In this paper we examine purposeful formation of Safety-Net Groups as a strategy for community development where people can attain a sense of belonging, and feel protected and safe. We explore Safety-Net Groups (SNGs) in relation to self-help groups, highlighting the potential of SNGs to take on a social action focus. This paper illustrates how SNGs can be developed, fostered and sustained and emphasises SNGs as a valuable and user-friendly tool for community development.

## **Introduction**

Community development is an integral part of social work education and practice. Community work, organisation or development has been taught as a method of social work practice especially in the developing world. Drawing on field experiences, the authors in this paper discuss the importance of community development in an Australian context and argue for a stronger involvement of community members in community development approaches when delivering professional social work practice through Safety-Net Groups (SNGs). SNGs are sometimes quite visible in rural communities, but they are often not formally organised or recognised as a powerful catalyst for change in communities. Yet, Safety-Net Groups can play an

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important part in community development processes and result in linking people into communities. Safety-Net Groups need to be fostered and sustained for the best interest of community growth and are useful tools to respond to the grassroots realities of communities.

The conceptualisation of Safety-Net Groups links concepts from community development and group work, and argues for the purposeful use of SNGs in community development. The notion of 'safety net' is globally recognised as assisting vulnerable people when they are in need. In the same way as a safety net in a circus is meant to catch acrobats if something goes wrong, safety nets are meant to catch people that are in strife. Thus the World Food Programme, for example, calls for a safety net for vulnerable groups affected by high food prices and natural disasters in Bangladesh (WFP, 2013). Similarly, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme of the Australian Government (Department of Human Services, 2013) is designed to provide a safety net for people who are spending significant amounts of their resources on their medical care. In the common use of the term a safety net is applied to people. SNGs in this discussion are conceptualised slightly differently. Firstly, SNGs are not applied to people, but develop out of the community for the community. The group itself forms to be a safety net. A SNGs can provide a back-up, a support for people. SNGs arise from within the community to support the community. Secondly, SNGs are positioned as a tool for community development. It is argued that SNGs can achieve more than the initial outcome of getting together to form a safety net for the community; the process of getting together and engaging with each other can lead to community growth. SNGs encompass the potential of groups to become '... rich sources of social capital and fully realised citizenship' (McDermott, 2002, p.3). SNGs can become important vehicles for community members to participate meaningfully and purposefully in a globalised world. SNGs can enable participants to strengthen themselves as well as develop social capital for individual and community action (McDermott, 2002).

The conceptualisation and processes of developing, fostering and sustaining Safety-Net Groups will be further expanded with a case study and a diagrammatic presentation in this chapter. The SNG is seen as facilitating an outcome, but also as a power house of change and described as such throughout this paper. Hence the reader will be oriented towards the potential of this group being conceived as evoking social action. SNGs not only provide a wide umbrella for people to come together, but also a way of showing interest in the welfare of the community. In some cases, the SNGs have grown out of a need of interested individuals responding to natural calamities. In other examples there are SNGs which are created with the intention of creating a change in the community. In this paper, we are aiming to discuss the concept of SNGs as a process and an outcome in the context of social change, social action and as a valuable strategy for community development.

### **Current Contexts Creating the Need for Safety-Net Groups**

Communities are under strain in a globalised world, where neo-liberal thinking has resulted in '...the promotion of political beliefs, values and practices that promote individual rather than collective responsibility for social problems' (Wallace & Peace, 2011, as cited in Morley & Dunstan, 2013, p. 142). Globalisation has led to social inequalities in a context of corporate dominance by some and vulnerability of others as transnational corporations pursue their own interests (Ganesh, Zoller & Cheney, 2005). Ife (2008, p. 55) argues that 'Poverty, unemployment, inadequate health care, homelessness, environmental degradation and unequal economic development are all clearly linked to the needs of global capitalism and the so-called economic 'imperatives' that are the determinants of social policy in all countries of the world'. Globalisation thus impacts the wellbeing of individuals, but also the community. Safety-Net Groups can be venues to get together to alleviate concerns, but also sites of collective resistance and power bases for social action. Ganesh et al. argue that it is important to examine and recognise the '...collective resistance efforts that aim for the transformation of power relations in the global economy' (2005, p. 177). Local communities are affected by global policies. Chenoweth (2012), for example, outlines that austerity measures have led to globalised welfare reforms, resulting in reduced welfare eligibility and reduced funding of non-Government organisations. Globalisation is increasing the divide between the rich and the poor (Gopalkrishnan, 2003). Safety-Net Groups can allow members to develop an awareness of global and structural issues that impact their communities and develop social action or programs to address these.

Rural communities in Australia may feel the impact of global strategies in various ways; the financial crisis has affected communities, with reductions in income support, education and health services (Dominelli, 2010). Services that used to be provided by full-time professionals in the community are outsourced and transferred to volunteers, impacting local economies (Gopalkrishnan, 2003). Economic hardship and environmental degradation are impacting on communities and there are disparities between urban and rural areas in terms of standard of living and service provision (Dominelli, 2010). Rural Australians are increasingly experiencing poverty and hardship, yet at the same time infrastructures and services are being removed as corporate bodies aim to protect their profits (Packer, Spence & Baere, 2002). Additionally, climate change affects the living conditions of the world. Global warming causes changes to living conditions, food production, water supplies and ecosystems; it produces extreme weather events that impact communities (Stern, 2007, as cited in McKinnon, 2008). Communities across the globe are affected by drought conditions as well as rising sea-water levels and floods, displacing people

from their communities (McKinnon, 2008). Rural communities across Australia have felt the impact of climate change. Australia is impacted by extreme weather variability, causing floods and increased risk of fires; therefore rural communities in Australia are impacted by reduced productivity and consequently viability (Buys, Miller, & van Megen, 2012). Communities need to find ways to respond to global conditions and the strains these impose on them. Safety-Net Groups can be part of this response.

### **Safety-Net Groups and Community Development**

A Safety-Net Group is a form of self-help group which provides mutual support and help to people in need (McDermott, 2002). While self-help groups provide information, programs, social networking and support opportunities to people who share common interests or experiences, SNGs are to be seen more as a concept that drives people to come together and then take action together. It does not follow the same membership pattern or structures of self-help which is focused on clinical support, therapeutic in nature or social support; rather it promotes growth, community spirit and takes on an advocacy role in its approach to community building. Self-help groups can also emerge as responses to structural inequalities or concerns and move towards collective action (McDermott, 2002). Thus some self-help groups may develop into SNGs, but what is argued here is that the focus needs to go beyond the internal focus on the well-being of the group members. Therefore, SNG is an umbrella term that has been used to describe the work carried out by a group of committed members of the community to evoke a community response and to create a safe place for communities. Hence, SNGs can be seen in this context as a community response to natural disasters.

Embedded in the concept of Safety-Net Groups is the notion that 'Community development is committed to the ideas that people can and should take more collective control and ownership for their resources and their future directions' (Kenny, 2011 p. 6). Community development as discussed here is about overcoming social exclusion, achieving socially just change, involving change from below, and is based on a commitment to empowering ordinary people (Kenny, 2011). Community development in this sense is looking to identify communities' strengths to build solutions from within. Community development from a strengths-based strategy is '... an intervention process used by social workers and other professionals to help individuals, groups, and collectives of people with common interests or from the same geographic areas to deal with social problems and enhance social wellbeing through planned collective action' (Barker, 2003, as cited in Poulin, 2010, p. 327). A critical element of strength-based community development is the creation and maintenance of positive relationships which are viewed as 'assets' (Ennis & West,

2013b, p. 42). 'Community development from an empowering perspective essentially requires practice with the community rather than just for the community, engaging with community members to develop plans and strategies for interventions. The key is working with and thus for the community' (Eversole, 2012). The local community can provide knowledge and insights that provide more valid perspectives than '...mainstream "scientific" or "professional" expert knowledge that typically informs policy and practice' (Eversole, 2012, p.33). Thus interventions in communities can become more relevant and effective. Although not exclusively for the purpose of community action, Safety-Net Groups can offer a vehicle for this work. In strength-based community development social workers need to develop the skills and ability of the community to get together and to act together. Importantly social workers need to use '...interactional skills to help community members make contacts, develop networks, build personal relationships, identify political and economic power in a community, and facilitate coalitions and committees' (Poulin, 2009, p.326).

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) suggest that significant community development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort. It explains why active and successful communities are never built from the top down, or from the outside in. Here Safety-Net Groups are described as locally owned, grown and sustained. They arise out a local concern, such as natural disasters destroying the livelihood of community members. In SNGs community members get together to invest in themselves. It is a development process that is bottom-up rather than a top-down approach (Kenny, 2011).

Working in groups can be a powerful tool for developing social capital in communities. Social capital will help communities respond to the difficulties a globalised life places on community members (McDermott, 2002). Groups come together for different purposes and in different contexts. In groups members are bound by a social experience; they communicate with each other and provide a sense of belonging and some context for getting together (McDermott, 2002). Groups involve people having relationships with each other. The relationships we have with others create the potential for change (Zuchowski, 2011). Groups can emerge as a response to inequitable conditions in society, and as such self-help groups, social action groups and advocacy groups may become sites of resistance to the status quo (McDermott, 2002). Resistance can be a valid response to the injustices that people experience. To achieve change in society, space needs to be created for individuals to link their personal experiences to structural issues (Zuchowski, 2011). Safety-Net Groups develop into spaces for this exploration.

### **Participation in Community to Safety-Net Groups**

Community is a word that means different things to different people and the meaning can vary depending on how it is used. Most people are members of many different communities at the same time, such as a neighbourhood community, community of friends, school communities, work communities and cultural communities. Belonging to a community teaches people about relationships and values, and enhances connectedness and resilience (Taylor, Wilkinson and Cheers, 2008). Being rejected by a community can result in feelings of alienation, isolation and powerlessness. Feelings of connection to a community can help people to:

- Achieve full potential
- Attain cultural identity
- Know the importance of family
- Develop a conscience
- Become self-reliant
- Cope with stress and frustration
- Handle worry and fear
- Develop future relationships (Australian Government, 2005, p. 24)

Community development has been recognised as an important strategy to develop programs to respond to people's needs; it has the potential to engage with the whole community to consider the particular contextual issues of people and groups in the community (Taylor et al., 2008). Taylor, Wilkinson and Cheers suggest that community development can address social health determinants and/or develop the community. Thus community development can address inequalities, but can also result in a sense of local ownership, a sense of connection and facilitate collective action (Taylor et al. 2008). Kenny (2011, p.3) takes this further and suggests that community development needs to work towards ensuring that '... people who are affected by decisions have collective ownership and control of, and responsibility for, those decisions, that they are based on mutual respect and trust, and sharing of knowledge, ideas and resources'. Thus, community development, according to Kenny, needs to have a change focus that critically involves community control and engagement; change from below is the heart of community development (Kenny, 2011). People need to be engaged and linked into communities to participate effectively. Ife (1995) suggests that for people to participate in community development they must see the issue as relevant or important, they must have a sense that their participation is valued, that their participation will make a difference and that diverse ways of participating are recognised and appreciated. Thus, Safety-Net Groups can form the basis for community development in a community. People access Safety-Net Groups as they experience issues that impact on their life. Safety-Net Groups need to be relevant to them. Ife (1995) highlights that people

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# Practice and Teaching Community Organisation in South Asia: Challenges and Opportunities

Bala Raju Nikku,\* PhD

## Abstract

Recognising the global, regional and local forces that are influencing communities, this chapter, based on the author's experience as a social work educator and community practitioner in the region, aims to discuss the nature and challenges for community work and its relationship to social work. Two central questions raised are: 1. How to organise South Asian communities that are negatively impacted by local and global social policies and practices, internal conflicts and weak governance systems? 2. How to introduce students of Social Work to the philosophical, political, and sociological theories that inform community organising and advocacy?

The chapter concludes that social work educators specialising in Community Work will have to (un)learn and refocus their teaching strategies to engage with these processes, and revise and re-interpret social work curricula and teaching methodologies. When this happens, it helps students who are interested in Community Work within broader Social Work to move further from a micro to a macro perspective with further proactive self-engagement and involvement in ensuring social, economic, cultural and political rights of community members that they work with and a life with worth and dignity.

**Key words:** Community Work, Social Work, South Asia, Engagement, Teaching, Communities, Community Organisation

## Introduction

Four important processes have changed the definition, nature and structure of communities and hence community organising in South Asia in the last three decades. Firstly, many countries in this region have gone through a series of internal conflicts and transitions and hence have struggled with institutionalising the building of human rights and democracy. Secondly, increased global influence to implement structural adjustment programs has resulted in weak social policies, causing further exclusion and deprivation of the communities. Thirdly, access to information communication technologies (ICT), social networking tools and mobility has benefited a few, but

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has also resulted in a digital divide that has further alienated some communities and lessened cohesion at large. Fourthly, involvement of social workers in organising communities in opposition to atrocities, exclusion and against forms of dominance is also evident in almost all countries of South Asia. At the same time, the history of social work education, praxis and professional recognition in this region is different, diverse, but also disjointed. This context provides immense challenges in teaching and the practice of community organisation in the region.

Recognising the global, regional and local forces that are influencing communities and community work/organisation, this chapter, based on interviews with social work educators from the region and the author's experience and self-reflection as a social work educator and in community practice in the South Asia region (particularly in India and Nepal), aims to discuss the nature and challenges for teaching and practising community organisation in the region and its relationship to social work.

To meet these aims, two main questions that this chapter tries to answer are: 1. How are communities in South Asia organised to address the unhelpful impacts by local and global policies and practices? and 2. What are the challenges of teaching Community Organisation? In other words, how best to introduce students of social work to the philosophical, political, and sociological theories that inform community organising and advocacy?

This chapter is divided into five sections. After an introductory section, section two presents how and why communities in South Asia are organised. Teaching community organisation in South Asia is discussed in section three. A detailed discussion is presented on teaching community organisations at the Nepal School of Social Work as an in-depth case in section four. Section five concludes the chapter.

### **Community, Community Organising and Social Work**

The term 'community' means different things to different people. Almost a century ago, MacIver (1882-1970), a distinguished Scottish-American sociologist, defines a community as needing not only a geographical identity but rather being a matter of spirit and interrelationship. He further defines community as 'an area of common life' (1917, 1935, pp. 21, 151). Are these ideas relevant or have the changed local and global contexts led to further confusions in defining the nature, scope and structure of a 'community' as the boundaries are blurring? Hence community organising is a means of bringing people together to address problematic social conditions.

Cohen (1985) defines community as a system of norms, values, and moral codes that provide a sense of identity for members. Fellin (2001) describes a community as a group of people who form a social unit based on common location (e.g., city or neighbourhood), interest and identification (e.g., ethnicity, culture, social class, occupation, or age) or some combination of these characteristics.

Like the term 'community' the term 'community organisation' (CO) has several meanings. It is often being used synonymously to community work, community development, community action and community mobilisation. Ross describes community organisation as a process by which a community identifies its needs or objectives, gives priority to them, develops confidence and will to work at them, finds resources (internal and external) to deal with them, and in doing so, extends and develops cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community (Ross, 1958; 1967).

The goals of community organising, particularly neighbourhood-based organising, vary, but generally include forming groups; bringing about social justice; obtaining, maintaining or restructuring power; developing alternative institutions; and maintaining or revitalising neighbourhoods (Fisher, 1994).

Scholars have also argued that Community Organisation is long-standing practices that predate community development, grounding a tradition for social workers that predate even the settlement house movement (Ross with Lappin, 1967). Stuart argued that the creation of Charity Organization Societies (COS) and Settlement Houses were the result of community organisation effort (Stuart, 2011). He further stated:

Community organization in social work . . . is widely used for a category of positions held by professional social workers in the social welfare field ... Social workers engaged primarily in 'community organization' are also to be found occupying a special staff role in medical and psychiatric agencies that give direct service. The distinguishing feature of all these positions is that they are primarily concerned with maintaining and developing the programs and standards of welfare agencies and services rather than directly helping individuals and groups. (Stuart, 2011, p. 424)

According to Chambers (who worked with Saul Alinsky), community organising is distinguishable from 'activism'. Activists engage in social protest without a coherent strategy for building power or for making specific social changes. Similarly, when people 'mobilise', they get together to effect a specific social change, but have no long-term plan. When the particular campaign that mobilised them is over, these groups dissolve and durable power is not built (Chambers, 2003).

Community goals are rarely accomplished in the absence of a coherent strategy and a target, a process for maintaining a fight over an extended period of time, and an institutional structure for holding people together and mobilising large numbers. Unlike activism, community organising consists of a coherent strategy, targeted sustained interactions, and intensive and durable power is built. Community organising creates durable institutions to give relatively powerless individuals a collective voice. In brief, the process of building a 'mobilisable community' is

called community organising (Alinsky, 1971). It involves the 'craft' of building an enduring network of people, who identify with common ideals and who can act on the basis of those ideals. In practice, it is much more than micro mobilisation or framing strategy (Snow et al., 1986).

Like social work, community organising has also a long, moral, and, at times, controversial tradition. Definitions, pronouncements and descriptions of social work consist of a combination of what authors understand to be the actual content of social work and what they think it should be, based on their judgment, theories and opinions. Even when we try to decide what social work is, these ideas come into the picture: social work as it appears, real-life demands on social workers and so on, and what we think social work should be (Ronnby, 1990).

Community organisers have contributed to the growth of social work. The development of the public assistance provisions of the 1935 Social Security Act in the USA created a great demand for personnel to administer social welfare programs. Knowledge of the method of community organisation became important for social workers in the field of public assistance (Reid, 1981):

Community organizing within social work has contributed its knowledge, skills, and leaders to these causes, and also has its own tradition. The early social workers were leaders in the social reform struggles of their day and also helped build community institutions, such as settlement houses and social services to meet people's needs. While community organizers have always been a minority in number within the social work profession, their impact has been significantly felt. Beginning with Jane Addams who founded one of the first settlement houses in Chicago (Hull House), they have been among the leaders of the movements for social security, labor reform, and health care, as well as shapers of the social programs in the 1960s and 1970s through the Economic Opportunity Act, Model Cities, Community Block Grants, and a myriad of other social service initiatives. (Mizrahi, 1993)

By the end of the 20th century we have seen the birth of professional associations for the study and promotion of community organisation. The Association for Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA) was formed in 1987 to strengthen community organisation and social administration. Another professional association named the Association of Macro Practice Social Workers (AMPSW) was organised in 2006. The presence and functioning of these professional associations suggests that community organisation has evolved into a distinct professional practice in its own right within the broader social work realm. Despite these developments within community organisation, feminist scholars have critiqued that:

Despite a rich and proud heritage of female organizers and movement leaders, the field of community organization, in both its teaching models and its major

exponents, has been a male-dominated preserve, where, even though values are expressed in terms of participatory democracy, much of the focus within the dominant practice methods has been non-supportive or antithetical to feminism. Strategies have largely been based on 'macho-power' models, manipulateness, and zero-sum gamesmanship. (Weil, 1986, p. 192)

### **Why and How are Communities Organised in South Asia?**

South Asia is a diverse region with countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka in transition and struggling with post-conflict issues. Out of eight countries of South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) three countries are land-locked (Nepal, Afghanistan and Bhutan) and four are declared as included (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal) as the least developed countries (LDCs).

There are many social, political, economic and ecological causes for which communities are organised in the South Asian Region: against lack of basic minimum public amenities, lack of sewerage in poor neighbourhoods, the need to support public schools, and affordable housing, to conserve rainwater, to name just a few.

### **Community Organising for Environmental Rights**

Communities in the South Asia region have been organised to protect their environmental and conservation rights. An important case is the Plachimada struggle. Coca-Cola, a multinational company based in the USA, has the largest soft drink bottling facilities in India. In 1950, Coca-Cola initially opened bottling plants in New Delhi and, by 1973, they operated twenty-two bottling plants in thirteen states in India. Coca-Cola re-entered India in 1993 following the opening up of the Indian economy to foreign investments in 1991 (Wramner, 2004). In a number of districts of India, Coca-Cola and its subsidiaries are accused of creating severe water shortages for the community by extracting large quantities of water for their factories, affecting both the quantity and quality of water. There have been numerous public protests against The Coca-Cola Company's operations, involving thousands of Indian citizens and several non-governmental organisations. Protests against the Coca-Cola factories have taken place in a number of districts including: Mehdiganj, near the holy city of Varanasi; Kala Dera, near Jaipur, state of Rajasthan; Thane district in Maharashtra; and Sivaganga in Tamil Nadu state. The protests by villagers from Plachimada have shown the strength of community-led activities, even against this global multinational company. The bottling plant opened in 1998 finally closed down in 2004 owing to the community's continued protests and legal activism (see Cockburn 2005; Shiva, 2008). The Plachimada Coca-Cola Victims' Relief and Compensation Claims Special Tribunal Bill 2011 was passed by the

Kerala Assembly in 2011 to help the victims of Plachimada in Kerala's Palakkad district who had alleged that the Coca-Cola plant had dried up their wells. The bill is still pending with the President of India for approval.

### **Nepal's Community Forestry: From Pilot to Policy**

In Nepal a system of forest administration barely existed until the 1950s (Mahat et al., 1986). Forest Acts of 1961 and 1967 reinforced forestry administration and the government's reluctance to part with ownership of and authority over forests with local communities. Changes in Nepal's forest legislation began as a result of a national forestry conference held in Kathmandu in 1975. Creation of the 1976 National Forestry Plan reinforced the rights of local users and offered legal provisions for handing over limited areas of government land to village councils (panchayats) with technical assistance provided by the Forest Department. By the mid-1980s it became apparent that if local institutions for forest management were legally formed, then resources would also be properly managed. A central component of this approach to organise forest communities has been the development of a user-group based on seeking consensus through dialogue and informal exchanges, and by increasing informed understandings about resource-related activities and possibilities (Shrestha & Gronow, 1992). Forest users are identified – including primary, secondary and tertiary users – and initially informed about their legislative rights and responsibilities, so that they are in a better position to decide whether they want to be user-group members. Agreements are reached by consensus. However, in many cases the local powerful and elites have dominated the decision-making. As a result of this power elite and a host of other factors, community forestry user-group performance has been uneven across the country. In some cases it has become 'committee forestry' rather than 'community forestry'. In addition to these issues, marginalisation of women, scheduled caste groups, and the poor, and a lack of knowledge about legislative and forest-users' rights remain much too prevalent (Shrestha, Kafle, & Britt, 1997).

Efforts were made by donor representatives, local nongovernmental community workers and some forest department front-line workers to organise and unite communities around forests as a source of their livelihood. This led to increased consensus, income-generation models and enhanced forest-user networks as platforms for communicating new ideas, disseminating information, sharing productive material, and collectively voicing concerns about resource-related policies and activities. While it is apparent that some inequities remain, forest-user exchanges are creating new pathways for collective community organising, seeking accountability, gaining access to forestry officials and politicians, and influencing policy (Ojha et al., 1999).

### **Challenges in Community Organising**

The two brief case studies presented above confirm that organising communities against ecological and environmental causes is challenging, time-consuming and process-oriented. Community organising seeks to unite previously unorganised people into effective groups and coalitions that work together in pursuit of a shared social agenda and goals.

The women of Plachimada were forced to trek long distances for water – something they eventually learnt was a result of the Coca-Cola plant that was drawing sub-surface water from huge wells sunk into the factory premises. This realisation brought them together and united them to fight against the multinational corporation. In the process they brought different kinds of pressures on the multinational company. This case study reinforces Rothman's (2007) conceptualisation of the social advocacy approach of community intervention. Social advocacy in its predominant mode 'relies on pressure as the core instrument of change with the aim of benefiting the poor, the disadvantaged, the disenfranchised and the oppressed (Rothman, 2007, p. 28).

The case of Nepal's community forestry shows that community members are aware of their roles and take ownership of the process. Bureaucracy, red tape and politics act as crucial hurdles that communities need to know how to challenge, using legal mechanisms to argue their points of view. While organising the community, the social worker must be able to distinguish this organisation from 'activism'.

So how to teach community organising effectively so that it helps social work students to acquire the required philosophical, analytical and application skills? This question is answered in the following section.

### **Teaching Community Organisation: Challenges and Opportunities**

Little has been published about instructional methods for teaching community organisation practice. (Prof. Donna Hardina, California State University (2002)

Although social justice is one of the central goals of the social work profession, the actual involvement of social workers in social change is very limited. Similarly practitioners lack the tools needed to analyse existing social problems and policies and to enable them to intervene (Weiss et al., 2006). To be able to promote social justice effectively, social workers (students, faculty, and practitioners) must understand and be able to analyse the impact of social structures on livelihoods and must be actively involved in community organisation and social action in order to better serve the needs of diverse populations and communities at large.

Scholars like Dunham (1958) and Siddiqui (1997) formulated principles of community organisation. Hardina (1997; 2002) lists core required analytical skills,

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# Organising Street Vendors: An Indian Case Study

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## Abstract

Street vending has become an integral part of urban economies and certainly has existed for hundreds of years. Street vending has in more recent times become a matter of concern to civil society and authorities in developing countries, especially in India, which has around ten million street vendors with three million of them street food vendors. This chapter surveys briefly different approaches to organising street vendors in India. A case study of Hyderabad city with around 120,000 vendors and different community organisation initiatives with street vendors offers a glimpse into varied possible approaches of organising street vendors. The Aarogya project for organising street vendors in Hyderabad is comprised of organising cooperatives of around 2000 street food vendors, offering thrift and credit, branding of street food, capacity building in hygiene, collective action and collaboration with civil society and authorities. The project approach to community work with street food vendors reflects the needs of members and effective approaches when the sector is faced with the possibility of legislation in the near future, reflecting the principles of social work and community development.

**Key words:** community organisation, cooperative, hawkers, National Policy on Street Vending, street food vendors

## Introduction

Street vending, an integral part of urban economies, has existed for hundreds of years. It is a rapidly growing phenomenon around the world (Bromley, 2000; Winarno & Allain, 1986). Street vending grew substantially in South Asian cities after the financial crisis of 1998 (Bhowmik, 2005). Street vending is an important segment of the informal economy in Asian countries (Kusakabe, 2006) and the size varies across the countries. Although street vendors make a significant contribution to the economy in developing countries, it has been underestimated and neglected (Bhowmik, 2005; Kusakabe, 2006; Winarno & Allain, 1986). Even estimates of

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the people engaged in street vending are not available in many countries and where it exists it is highly under-reported because street vending is not fully recognised or legalised. The informal sector is so important to the urban economies that 'it has continued to flourish, even when illegal or state-oppressed' (FAO, 2007).

Literature on street vending or particular trades within it is scant (Bhowmik, 2005; Kusakabe, 2006). Studies reveal that street vending is critical to the local economy, employment, food security, social mobility and democratisation of social and economic resources in developing countries (Bhowmik, 2005; FAO, 2007). Studies also reveal that problems faced by street vendors in Asian cities are largely similar, owing to its status as informal sector or illegal (FAO, 2007; Kumar & Singh, 2009; Kusakabe, 2006). The street vendors in India, according to the National Policy on Urban Street Vending, 2009 (NPUSV) (Govt of India, 2009), face harassment from public authorities, who often regard street vendors as a nuisance and as encroachers of sidewalks and pavements. Street vending in Asian cities is viewed as a highly precarious and risky occupation and as such the vendors become a vulnerable community, devoid of rights, lacking in state recognition, social security, and access to institutional credit. They are also subject to constant threat of eviction or confiscation of their goods. Street vending is illegal in many parts of Thailand, Cambodia and Mongolia (Kusakabe, 2006). Around three-fourths of street vendors operate in unauthorised sites in Bangkok (Thailand). Bribes to police and market security officials are a sad reality, because street vending lacks recognition in Phnom Penh (Cambodia). Harassment and threats of evictions are regular in Manila (Philippines), although there is a licence system and payment of taxes to the municipal authorities, as there are no areas demarcated yet for street vending. Harassment and rent-seeking by corrupt officials is found in Dhaka (Bangladesh) because street vending is not legal. The risks and threats faced by the street vendors are relatively fewer in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Colombo. In Kuala Lumpur there is a National Policy on Hawkers, 1990 and the Department of Hawkers & Petty Traders was established in 1986 to ensure effective implementation of the policy. While in Singapore all street vendors are licensed, they are partly recognised in Colombo as they pay taxes to municipal authorities (Bhowmik, 2006). Street food vendors in India, Kuala Lumpur, and Bangkok constitute around 30 to 35 per cent of total street vendors (Bhowmik, 2006). In the Asian continent the street food industry is a vast business involving huge amounts of money and millions of people (FAO, 1989). Studies reveal that 33 per cent of the customers in Kolkata purchase street foods each day and Bangkok street food contributes up to 40 per cent of the total energy intake of city residents. Collective total annual sales of street foods in Kolkata is estimated at US \$60 million (FAO, 2007), in Bangkok it exceeds US \$98 million per year and in Malaysia it is over \$2 billion (FAO, 2007). Monthly food expenditure on food prepared at home in Thailand declined from 76

per cent to 50 per cent between 1990 and 1998 with increased procurement of food eaten away from home (Nirathron, 2006). A similar trend of a growing share of street food in urban residents' food choices and changing dietary trends due to increased consumption of street food have been observed in other Asian cities (Draper, 1996; Kusakabe, 2006). Between 6 and 50 per cent of the food budget in Indian urban households is spent on street foods (Seth, 1990; FAO, 1989).

When the street vendors are not organised as a community their vulnerability is greater as their voice is weak to represent and negotiate with the state to ensure their rights to livelihood and share in city space. Owing to the nature of their occupation and pressure to complete the business in a few hours of the day, they are less motivated to devote spare time for meetings or activities of the unions (Singh, 2000) and 'most of the vendors in Asia are not unionised' (Bhowmik, 2005, p. 2263). National level federations are seen in Korea and India; the presence of women is very high in Hanoi (Vietnam) and women are more organised than males in Manila. Women vendors in India are small in number compared to males and are least organised. A street vendor, according to the NPUSV, is 'a person who offers goods or services for sale to the public in a street without having a permanent built-up structure' (Govt of India, 2009). Street vendors may be stationary in the sense that they occupy space on the pavements or other public/private spaces on a regular basis, or they may be mobile, moving from place to place by carrying their food items on push carts or in baskets on their heads. In this paper, the term 'street vendor' or 'hawker' includes stationary as well as mobile vendors.

### **Street Vending in India**

Although there are varied estimates of street vendors, they constitute a significant population in India. It is estimated that street vendors in several cities count for about 2 per cent of the national population of India (Govt of India, 2009). Street vendors gained wider acceptance in India from the mid-90s. The Bellagio International Declaration of Street Vendors on November 23, 1995 stressed that the 'proliferation of poor hawkers and vendors' in the urban sector, 'are looked upon as a hindrance to the planned development of cities both by the elite urbanities and the town planners alike', despite the useful service they render to society (National Association of Street Vendors of India [NASVI], n. d). Greater attention to the problem also reflects growing debate on the right to city and public space by different sections of urban India.

### **Policy on Street Vending**

Taking the lessons drawn from the policy of 2004 as well as the successes achieved in a few cities, the NPUSV 2009 was formulated which clearly recognises street vendors' role in urban economies and declares the government's commitment

to give them recognition and offering them scope for their mainstreaming. The NPUSV 2009 has recognised street vendors as ‘micro-entrepreneurs’ and an ‘important occupational group of the urban population’ assisting the Government in combating unemployment and poverty necessitating state ‘recognition at all levels of government land support’ (Govt of India, 2009). Important elements of the policy include: legal status through recognition and registration along with social security for the vendors, spatial planning, demarcation of vending zones, provision of infrastructural facilities, social security measures, promotion of health and hygiene, roles and responsibilities of various bodies for participatory planning, etc. The policy also refers to promoting ‘organizations of street vendors e.g. unions / co-operatives / associations and other forms of organizations to facilitate their collective empowerment’ (Govt of India, 2009).

The national policy has been adopted in seven of India’s 28 states since 2005. The Andhra Pradesh Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Bill, 2010 reflects the spirit of the national policy, but is yet to be passed in the legislative assembly. Several states also initiated measures as part of urban renewal missions in regulation and recognition, even without adopting a policy on street vending. Progress on the national policy is not uniform across the country, despite varied experiments by state governments or municipal authorities locally.

### **Concerns of the street vendors**

Delay in finalising the policy into a law and ongoing acts of eviction of vendors, or registration of some vendors, or supporting vending zones by the local authorities in a few cities make it difficult for vendors to understand what the authorities intend to do and what their role in it is. Negotiation and dialogue with the stakeholders is not seen for want of a consistent policy for the city as a whole and a participatory process to address the challenges in regulation and protection of street vending is not in place. Vendors’ unions and forums at the local level lack information about the growing debate. Licensing of street vending activity, an important component of the proposed new policy initiative, could become an additional tool of exclusion as those who are not licensed are branded ‘illegal’.

The process of demarcation of the urban area into ‘restriction-free vending’ (green vending zone), ‘restricted vending’ (amber vending zone) and ‘no vending’ (red vending zone), according to the NPUSV 2009, has potential for severe conflict with the possibility of some vendors being displaced. Implementation of vending zones is not received well as it lacks informed participation of the street vendors in the process. For instance, declaration of twelve no-vending zones in Bhubaneswar city, which has already implemented 55 vending zones successfully, to the appreciation of several government and civil society agencies and local vendors,

is faced with resistance from the vendors' unions. Vendors' unions allege the demarcation of no-vending zones is arbitrary because there is no Town Vending Committee formed in Bhubaneswar city (Mohapatra, 2012). The current national bill on street vending suggests at least 40 per cent representation of street vendors in Town Vendors Committees which, properly implemented, gives a fair chance to the vendors to have a say in all regulatory activities like zoning. The vendors are forced to pay bribes to representatives of several government agencies to carry out their business (Bhowmik, 2006; FAO, 2007).

### **Street Food Vending**

Street foods, also referred as the informal food sector (IFS), comprise a wide variety of ready-to-eat food that include meals, beverages, and snacks prepared and/or sold by vendors in streets (FAO, 1989). They are typically sold on the street from 'pushcarts or baskets or balance poles, or from stalls or shops having fewer than four permanent walls' (Tinker, 1987). It is critical to the production and use of a variety of food products in the region. Street food, often self-financed by the vendor and self-regulated, is a well-established institution of the food culture of a city (Hoffman & Dittrich, 2009; Kusakabe, 2006; Nischalke, 2011) and a 'cherished part of local culture' that is also an attraction for tourists in many cities (FAO, 2007, p. 2). In some cities eating street food is so popular that many street foods form an important share of the city resident's food requirements. Gisele Yasmeeen (1996) referred to the popularity of street food in Thai cities as 'public eating'. Kolkata in India is also popular for street food with around 130,000 street food-vending stalls (FAO, 2007), and Malaysia has approximately 100,000 vendors (Dawson & Canet, 1991). It has been a fast-growing food distribution system since the 1940s (Bhat & Waghray, 2000).

It is observed that street food vending survives not merely because it is an important source of employment, but also because it provides cost-effective food to the urban population. Available literature indicates the potential of street food for food security, especially of the urban poor, and its contribution to the uniqueness and cultural identity of the cities and livelihoods of a large number of the urban poor (Bergmann & Dittrich, 2012; Rani & Dittrich, 2010).

However, there are concerns. The perishable nature of their preparations forces them to sell the food items at the earliest. Not only are they ignored by the state and denied benefits from welfare programs, but also by labour unions (FAO, 2007). Studies reveal that street food vendors do not form a homogeneous group (Draper, 1996) owing to the specialisation of their food items, location of their operations, size of the unit, and gender of the vendor.

Street food is also subject to stigma and misconceptions about the street foods and the nature of street food trade. Misconceptions about street food are related

to stigma, according to Tinker (1988), that the street food trade is a hangover from traditional market activities; is characteristic of and dominated by women; is focused in the main commercial areas of urban centres; street foods are 'dirty' and 'dangerous' to eat; that only the poor eat them; that they do not make an important contribution to dietary intake. The predominant misconception of street food is that it is eaten by the poor and that it is unhygienic or unsafe compared to mainstream restaurants and eateries. Customers or patrons of street food are not only urban poor but from all walks of life (FAO, 2007; Kusakabe, 2006). Yet, street foods received little official attention and more notice has been paid to the potential dangers arising from the consumption of street foods than to any benefits they might offer. Much of the bias against street foods, however, is unfounded and based more on prejudice than empirical data. (Draper, 1996)

Studies in India also reveal that the stigma of street food as unhygienic has no basis with regard to most of the street food units (Neeraja, 2006). Changing social demography and food culture makes street food no longer synonymous with cheap food (Chada & Mamidi, 2012).

### **Organising Indian Street Vendors**

Research suggests that promotion of certain conditions is critical to the growth and organisation of street vendors. Important elements to foster pro-vendor policy require building a positive image of vendors, a holistic approach engaging all stakeholders: vendors and authorities and civil society; networking among vendors' organisations at different levels to enable the struggle to acquire a larger perspective and identify spaces for intervention in policy-making; and political will (Kumar, 2012). Studies also suggest the need for capacity building for food safety improvements (Bergmann & Dittrich, 2012; Draper, 1996) in line with 'local social and cultural contexts' in bringing the sector towards standardisation (FAO, 2007, p. 28), supportive policy environment linking street food with poverty alleviation strategies (FAO, 2007) and long-term plans for city development. These different and varied areas provide space for different organisations to address one or more of the activities best suited to them, and come together at times for advocacy and extending solidarity with other organisations as part of the larger goal of ensuring protection, social security and infrastructural support to the vendors in participatory governance structure. Street vendors' needs also shape the types of community organisation. Their needs include security of tenure, recognition, access to infrastructure facilities, capacity building to improve food safety and hygiene, participation in decision making processes affecting them and conflict resolution with local forces or with fellow vendors or other stakeholders with claims to the use of space in the street.

Organising the street food vendors is faced with several challenges owing to the unique nature of their activity. Several factors, revealed by studies highlighting one or more factors in specific contexts across the country, explain the low level of street vendors' participation in the organisations, viz., individual vendors have little hope of forcing the state to change in their favour, little or no space for participation in the governance of market and use of city space, possible continuity of their operations by keeping local authorities satisfied through bribes or other means, absence of a threat from the state to stop their business, heterogeneity of the street vendors, and immediate concern of the self-employed to recover their investment and make some surplus for the next day. Organising street vendors is a difficult task as they are self-employed (Singh, 2000). They need to make the best of every minute of their time on the street and join groups for collective action only when they are faced with problems of eviction. Short-term collective action is also seen in the face of threats of eviction.

There is constant conflict characterised by distrust and an ongoing tug-of-war between the town authorities and the street vendors wherein town authorities follow anti-encroachment drives and the vendors uphold their right to livelihood and to organise struggles (Kumar, 2012). 'Fire-fighting' or stop-gap strategies employing protests and struggles offer temporary relief to the vendors to continue their business (Bhowmik, 2001). Hawkers treated as 'illegal' are subject to stigma that perpetuates exploitation and extortion by several agencies. There are multiple government agencies and norms the street vendors have to interact/ comply with in order to continue their operations. Street vending is subject to municipal authorities, police, traffic police, regional development authorities, district administration, etc. (Bhowmik & Saha, 2012; Kumar & Singh, 2009). While the municipal laws regulate the use of pavements, the traffic police regulate the use of roads. Hawkers are often evicted for obstructing free flow of traffic. About 77 per cent of the street food vendors complained of frequent harassment from local traffic police, or municipal authorities, or the food inspectors (Chada & Mamidi, 2012).

Community organisation among street food vendors in Hyderabad has elements of Rothman's community development model: locality development, social planning, and social action (Rothman & Tropman, 1987). Mobilisation and organisation of street food vendors is broadly characteristic of people of a geographic area (like a slum, market area, city) sharing common interest rooted in street food vending. Strategies and approaches adopted by varied agencies engaged in community organisation with the vendors for identifying the problems, priorities and defining the goals reflect their extent of outreach, both in terms of geographic area and number of vendors. It also reflects the degree of trust enjoyed with regard to the vendors and available resources to accomplish the common goals reflecting

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