



Empowerment Based Social Work Practice: An Approach for Integrated Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

Social work is one of the unique training and profession which strives to enhance the human being through sustain their capabilities and inherent strengths. In practice arena the profession is using various models, approach and intervention modalities to meet the needs and to ameliorate the problems of individual, families, groups, organisation and community. The prime goal of social work practice is to empower the individuals at different level. Empowerment has been a consistent theme within the social work profession for over a century. Hence NASW (1996) directed in its ethical preamble that “The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty”.

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Introduction

Social work is one of the unique training and profession which strives to enhance the human being through sustain their capabilities and inherent strengths. In practice arena the profession is using various models, approach and intervention modalities to meet the needs and to ameliorate the problems of individual, families, groups, organisation and community. The prime goal of social work practice is to empower the individuals at different level. Empowerment has been a consistent theme within the social work profession for over a century. Hence NASW (1996) directed in its ethical preamble that “The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty”. Empowerment is multi-dimensional approach which can be achieved through synchronised effort that work with just not on people, their relationship, and the social and political environment (Hossen, 2005). This multi-stage interaction would initiate, sustain and amplify the empowered functioning among the individual and community at large. The empowered person will receive respect, success and will make influence on factors which playing most on his/her life. This realisation of interpersonal success builds confidence to make an intensive interaction at the institutional level and drives the people to be assertive about their right and obligation. Consequently an ethical or ideal society offers equal access to powers to act on their own will and wish.

Empowerment: Meaning And Concept

Empowerment has different meaning in various dimensions. The original concept of empowerment espoused by Paulo Freira. Freira expounded the notion of “conscientisation” as the process by which the poor could challenge the structure of power and gain power from the powerful that is poorer and deprived sections of a given society would take control of their lives. Thus empowerment is thought to be an enabling process for full participation in formulation, executions and evaluation of decisions determining the function and efficiency for the society. It can be visualised empowerment as a strategy to

facilitate the awareness of inequality, capacitate them to force a change in those sphere where they have felt punch. In broader context empowerment refers to questioning social, economic and political discriminatory parhos, distortions in democratic dimension, down casting in development and all other speres (Mandal.A. 2004). Rappaport (1987) defines empowerment as ‘a process, a mechanism by which people, organisations and communities gain mastery over their affairs, and involve themselves in the democratic processes of their community and employing institutions. According to Karl (1995), Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation to greater decision-making and control and to transformative action. Empowerment is the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families and communities can take action to improve their situations (Lorraine and Robert, 1991).

Empowerment is a process of internal and external change. The internal process is the person’s sense or belief in her ability to make decisions and to solve her own problems. The external change finds expression in the ability to act and to implement the practical knowledge, the information, the skills, the capabilities and the other new resources acquired in the course of the process (Parsons, 1988). Empowerment is an interactive process which occurs between the individual and his environment, in the course of which the sense of the self as worthless changes into an acceptance of the self as an assertive citizen with socio-political ability. The outcome of the process is skills, based on insights and abilities, the essential features of which are a critical political consciousness, an ability to participate with others, a capacity to cope with frustrations and to struggle for influence over the environment (Kieffer, 1984). The process of empowerment is an active process. Its form is determined by the circumstances and the events, but its essence is human activity in the direction of change from a passive state to an active one. The process brings about an integration of self-acceptance and self-confidence, social and political understanding, and a personal ability to take a significant part in decision-making and in control over resources in the environment. The sense of personal ability connects with civic

commitment. Individual empowerment is an expression on the individual level of a multi-levelled process which may be applied to organizations, communities, and social policy (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Some writers call the internal change psychological empowerment and the external change political empowerment. According to this distinction, psychological empowerment occurs on the level of a person's consciousness and sensations, while political empowerment is a real change which enables a person to take part in the making of decisions that affect his life. To achieve psychological empowerment a person requires only internal strengths, while to realize his political personal empowerment a person requires environmental conditions, mainly organizational ones, which will enable him to exercise new abilities (Gruber & Trickett, 1987).

In this view empowerment can be viewed as multi-level as well as multi-dimensional process which includes individual, family and community at large. At individual level one will be empowered to participate actively in decision-making which largely make impact on his life directly or indirectly. In family level the whole unit will be sustained and mainstreamed to take collective decision to over all development of family. But empowerment at community level is comprehensive process that leads the social change at structural and functional dimensions. Further, it would initiate the interaction between various social units and institutions, confront with new perspectives to serve the society in better manner and facilitate the collective action to bring the radical change at societal setting.

Empowerment And Social Work

The restructuring "power pattern" of society is major concern of social work practice at micro, mezo and macro level. Though the term empowerment is new, its roots can be traced from the very beginning of social work practice at western as well in India. Since its inception it has been striving to empower the people through its various clientele services. The core goal of social work has always been to give more power to the disadvantaged, the poor and rejected. The role of the social worker is help individuals to adjust or accept problems, but to help them to develop the ability to change the situation and prevent its reoccurrence (Lorraine and Robert, 1991). The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (ASSW, 2001). The Social work practice is tend to support and strengthen peoples natural abilities and capacities for handling their own affairs, to improve environments to ensure the conditions are present to maximise social well being and provide care where needed and to work toward transforming the conditions and social structures that create inequitable social order (Mckay, 1999).

The term empowerment got a widespread when the anthropological tradition of seeing change as constant in social process and the refinement of alternative development paradigm in the 80s merged together in 1990. In spite of all these argument the social work had empowerment as a core value in its practice and operational modalities. Empowerment based social work practice is an extract of Strength based practice that strongly believe in inherent strength of an individual, family and community. The empowerment based social work is much concern about redistribution of centralised power to all the

elements of society without making any discrimination on the basis of race, gender and identity. Powerless is to be addressed through empowerment based practice by which one can gain competence to gain the power to take decision which will make larger impact on his life.

Sustainable Development And Empowerment Based Practice

Sustainable development is the buzzword of current development scenario. Sustainable development has been defined "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. While aiming to maximize the well-being of today's generation, it is important to take a long-term perspective, taking into account the consequences of our actions for our children, their children and grandchildren, ensuring that the resources they will require for their own well-being are not depleted, and that the natural environment into which they will be born will not be polluted or destroyed. It reflects various dimensions and perspectives of various groups of the society. The empowerment based practice will assist to the vulnerable section to realise their role in development process as well accelerate their "conscious" to be part of main stream development. The frame work of Empowerment based practice provides refreshing insights to the marginal groups to how "Power agenda" can be drawn to take concrete steps forward. Particularly United Nations (1994) recognises the importance of supporting women as decision makers, citing "the empowerment and autonomy of women, and improvements in their political, social, and economic and health status... as highly important ends in them. In addition, they are seen as essential for the achievement of sustainable development".

Sustainable development is conceptualized as resting on three inter-related pillars: economic development, social development and environmental protection. A fourth pillar- the preservation of cultural diversity has been proposed. This conceptual categorization can lead to treating these areas in isolation without accounting for a whole range of channels through which these pillars reinforce each other and bring about sustainable development. Instead, by taking an integrated and holistic approach to socio-culturally responsible, environmentally-friendly economic development, sustainable development can be revealed as a multifaceted and dynamic process. As noted in a recent report by the Secretary General, "the goal, and indeed the ultimate test, of sustainable development is the convergence among the three trajectories of economic growth, social development and environmental protection" (UNESCO, 2001).

Strategies Of Empowering People

In order to empower the people for sustainable development, practitioner needs to design the unique strategies from bottom to up. Along with that social workers need to play various roles such as catalyst, change agent and moderator to make the people more powerful and worthy. Empowerment process takes from the individual to community level and each levels are interrelated and mutual complementary. In this regard social worker needs to adopt various strategies to yield the better result at empowerment process.

Grassroots Mobilisation

A small and grass root group is ideal arena to implement the empowerment intervention as it allows the people to realise the need of empowerment and individual experience of the group would make greater impact on other members. The grassroots mobilisation is seeks to build people's capacities, leadership and

confidence. It equips the marginalised with the skills, methods and knowledge needed to take self-reliant actions to improve their lives and conditions in their communities. The philosophy of the Grassroots mobilisation says that people shouldn't wait to be rescued from the external force rather they must take action to meet their basic needs and requirements.

Conscientisation

The original idea of conscientisation was propounded by Paulo Freire. The objective of the objective of conscientisation is to power the knowledges and resources of groups, by facilitating a learning process that becomes critical, "transitive" and dialogical consciousness, and then potentiality of "liberation". The "conscientisation" is a practice diffused in many countries, mainly in South America, based on the trust in oppressed "knowledge" and on the questioning role of leader who educates and learns by dialoguing. It believes that people are able to participate but temporarily unwilling to do so because they may lack the consciousness, competence or confidence. It is a form of praxis in which people reflect critically on objective reality and act on that reflection to 'transformation the world'. Within the social work practice the conscientisation technique often used while working with women, the women and dalits. In India, the conscientisation extensively used in community development and radical social work practice. There are two aspects of conscientisation; reflection in search of understanding dehumanising social structure and action aimed at alerting societal conditions. The Social work practice within the conscientisation approach must encourage the development of awareness in human beings, both the people with whom social workers involved and social worker themselves. Once conscientisation becomes incorporated into social work, we must keep in mind that we, as professionals, cannot conscientize others if we have not reached a specific degree of conscientisation ourselves (Alfero, 1972).

Advocacy

Advocacy is the focal point of discussion in concurrent social work practice. The history of advocacy in social work can be traced during the period of charity movement in the 1870s and 1880s (Burghardt, 1987). Advocacy is nothing but being voice for voiceless and standing in favour of people who have been oppressed by the society for various reasons. It aims to motivate the social workers to work for social and natural justice of the marginalised groups. In Social work perspective advocacy can be defined as the act of directly representing, defining, intervening, supporting or recommending a course of action on behalf of one or more individuals, groups or communities with the goal of securing or retaining social justice (Mickelson, 1995). Social workers continue to carry the torch for those who need help to succeed in our society. Mobilizing resources, public opinion, interacting with agencies whose responsibilities is to serve the needs of vulnerable populations is ways social workers champion the rights of individuals, communities and society at large through active participation in the political process. Whether concerned about an individual's needs or social policy reform, social workers are most frequently the voice for change and social justice (NASW, 2002). Social workers advocate in many other ways as well. These include

- **Media involvement:** Social workers help educate the public by writing letters to the editor and op-ed pieces that clarify misinformation about social programs and point out social injustices that may otherwise escape public attention.
- **Community organizing:** Social workers have long worked to empower citizens by helping them plan activities that address

social problems, improve services and enhance social well-being.

- **Demonstrations:** Social workers continue to use this organizing tool to empower citizens. This tool can be used when certain social icons resisting the improvements of icons and groups in a society.

Lobbying

Lobbying is one of the powerful tool in community organisation as well in empowerment based social work practice. This is a communication process between right holders and right bearers, in other word interaction between state and people. Literary it can be conceptualised as an act attempting to influence government or political leaders to create legislation or conduct an activity that will help an individual, group, and organisation or to community at large. In this process social works has to perform the role lobbyist who speaks to the authority and state on behalf of marginalised people. Along with that he has to use some other tools like networking, collaboration and demonstration to accelerate the speed of lobbying.

Conclusion

The prime goal of the empowerment based social work is to maximise the social, economic and spiritual well being of the marginalised people. Empowerment of oppressed people is not a passive rather active process. In which social workers as well oppressed people have to initiate the interaction with contextual factors. In this approach client just not be empowered rather he has to help the client to identify the area and to visualise the pace of power dynamics which will make larger impact on their life. As stated in discussion empowerment based practice is an extract of strength perspective and it aimed to oppose to all form of oppression, domination, subordination and exploitation. By focusing on strength of the individual rather than deficiency real empowerment can be achieved. The ultimate goal of the social work is to bring the world happiness and keep the pluralism without any discrimination and humiliation. Along with that state agency and development organisations need to incorporate the empowerment principle and values to minimise the gap between power have and have-nots.

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The *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001) states that cultural diversity is key to sustainable human development.

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