

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON LEADERSHIP LESSONS IN EMPOWERING SOCIALLY EXCLUDED YOUTH



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Abstract

India is the second most populous country in the world. The population explosion has given rise to unprecedented social, cultural and other economic problems in the country. According to an estimate, there are more than five crore unemployed youth registered in the employment exchanges of the country, while the number of unregistered unemployed youths is more than the registered ones. Such youth are mostly in remote, rural and semi-urban areas and their number is increasing by the day. The empowerment of Dalit youths is a major challenge for developmental organisations. This paper draws attention to the leadership skills required for the youth led organisations who are working among Scheduled caste youth or other socially excluded youth in the society. The formation of Dalit support organisations and networks helps to strengthen the activities of Dalit groups, and helps them to put forward their case for equity and equal access to resources.

Keywords: Development, Identity, Sensitisation, Diversification

Introduction

Social exclusion describes a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household.

Exclusion is frequently more subtle and unintentional, for example when disabled people are excluded from services, markets and political participation through a lack of awareness of their needs or by social attitudes, or when minority groups are excluded by language barriers. In addition, the resulting sense of powerlessness can rob people of their self-confidence and aspirations and their ability to challenge exclusion. When people feel they are being judged on the basis of whom they are, they may perform less well. When

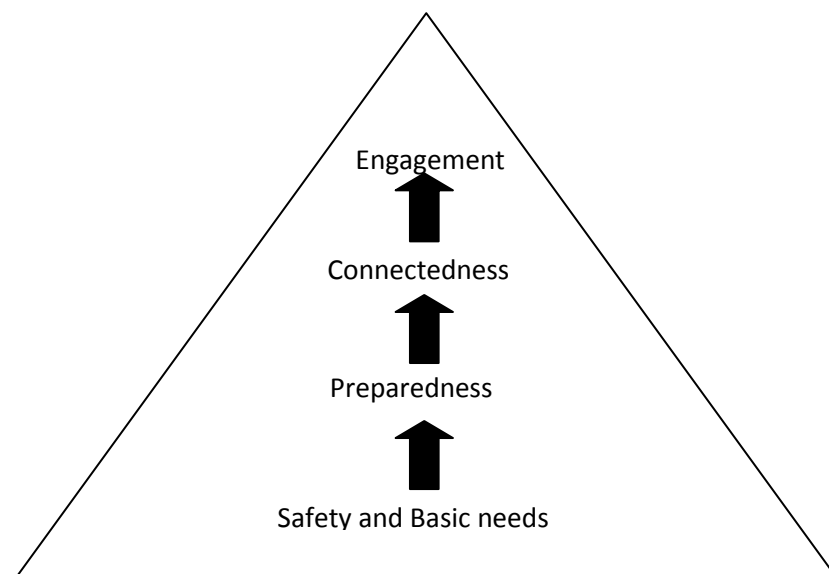
people expect prejudice, it can undermine their motivation to achieve. Young people who feel alienated from society and excluded from job opportunities and decision-making may turn to violence and crime as a way of feeling more powerful – as shown by experience in Central America. Young men who feel disenfranchised, lack jobs and have few local community facilities may join territorial or identity-based gangs. So it's an important juncture where society should think of another alternative for the nation building process.

The Process and Goals of Youth Development

Development is a process, not a goal. People continue to develop throughout their lifetimes. Therefore, promoting youth development is an enduring, overarching purpose, not a goal that is ever finally achieved. John Dewy (1938) captured this quality by noting that the purpose of development is to enable a person to continue to develop. Viewing development in this way complicates the identification of goals. Rather than setting out concise measurable behaviors, developmental goals identify demands for growth. Progress, opposed to attainment, is the key (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972).

This circular quality of development makes it difficult to separate goals from methods for achieving goals. Goals and methods, ends and means, and process and product are intertwined. Because goal setting is such an important part of program planning, we will refer to developmental goals, recognizing that even though such goals are not always amendable to measurable outcomes or behavioural objectives, they can provide a helpful framework to guide action.

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO THRIVE?



Bottom line – Young people need their needs met (shelter, food, etc) and feel safe before they can grow and learn. Youth in survival mode do not thrive.

Preparedness – Young people need to develop competencies and skills to ready themselves for work and adult life. Competencies range from academic, social, emotional to vocational, cultural.

Connectedness – Young people need to belong, to be connected to family and community to thrive. A growing body of brain research indicates that we are hardwired to connect. It is a core requisite to learn, develop and interact with the world.

Engagement – Young people need opportunities to engage in meaningful activities, have a voice, take responsibility for their actions, and actively participate in civic discourse.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE POSITIVE OUTLOOK OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:

Make identity support a crucial focus of youth development.

Through healthy identity development, young people build an autonomous yet socially integrated and connected sense of self. Identity work is often seen as tailored to youth with “special” needs. The researches show that identity support has an important place in the standard practice of all organizations that touch youth’s lives. All young people need access to information on their histories and backgrounds. They need adult role models. They need a space where they can explore their identities safe from the threat of stereotyping, harassment, or rejections.

Use youth organizing strategies to engage young people as leaders in their communities.

Youth organizing is a practical approach to grassroots community change. In a research initiated by Ford Foundation, they found out that the groups which adopted a social justice orientation helped the youth to channelize their anger and energy into productive civic action. Their accomplishments demonstrate that, if provided with a structure and framework for identifying challenges in their communities, developing a change agenda, and taking action, youth are interested and enthusiastic about taking on community-change issues. Although not all youth-serving organizations can adopt youth organizing practices, strategic alliances between youth development and youth organizing groups are effective at exposing youth to social justice issues.

Create formal and well-defined decision-making roles for youth.

Formal and independent structures for youth leadership, such as independent youth councils, were more successful at promoting youth decision making than were structures that relied on youth input into adult processes. Putting two or three young people on an adult board may teach them about board functions and lend a youth perspective, but it doesn’t provide young people with authentic decision-making power or influence. However, research does show that young people can successfully participate on adult boards. For youth to succeed on adult boards organizations must do intensive training and orientation and institute changes in procedures, as many of the youth-led organizations have done, to overcome power imbalances between youth and adults.

Teach adults to step back without tuning out.

For youth decision making to work, adults need to step back and have faith that, if given the responsibility, young people will make sound decisions. At the same time, adults must avoid tuning out. They play important support and advisory roles in youth decision making. Adults must learn to provide a high level of support to youth decision makers without taking over and usurping (take a position of power illegally or by force) their authority.

Make time for youth decision making and input.

Lack of time was an impediment to youth involvement in decision making. Youth-led organizational processes tend to occur more slowly in order to accommodate and respond

to young people's learning curve. Organizations that want increased youth involvement in decision making must be willing and able to slow down their processes so that youth can play an authentic role.

Use a focused approach with a targeted set of young people to yield the strongest results.

Organizations often overextend themselves in order to meet funders' expectations by serving large numbers of youth. In contrast, if the organizations carefully targeted who and how many young people they wanted to reach will allow them to develop a population specific curricula and to build close, stable mentoring relationships with youth

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Link organizational development to programming goals.

Organizational development worked best when it will be focused on enhancing the capacity of Youth led organizations to conduct civic activism programming. Strategic planning, documentation, evaluation, etc. should done from the beginning itself. The documentation effort centered on effective curriculum and best programming practices will enable the practitioners train new staff and youth leaders to engage in civic activism and social change.

Carefully structure leadership and staff transitions to maintain organizational stability and capacity.

If the staff structure is weak, it will affect the other developmental strategies. The repeated transitions of staff and leadership roles results in the stability and continuity of the institution. In a report published by the Ford foundation explains that they have faced the above situation but they overcome after effective management of the roles and position among the staff. Two Youth led organizations, however, managed to transfer leadership smoothly.

First, in each of these cases, the executive directors who were leaving the organization were invested in supporting a smooth transition and were committed to continue working at the organization until their **successor had come on board and felt equipped to lead.**

Second, great care was taken in **selecting a successor whose values and approach** were a good match to the organization.

Third, transition plans were put into place, which served as an invaluable roadmap for incoming staff.

Document each step of the process to minimize institutional memory loss and promote best practices.

Organization should have a monitoring and evaluation department which will document each step of the process. Documentation of innovative workshops, trainings, and best practices will protect the organization from institutional memory loss and safeguard the valuable knowledge gained from the programmes. This process is key to long-term sustainability because as organizations grow and expand, manuals, guides, and curricula play an important role in orienting new staff to the program philosophy and concrete strategies to engage youth.

Offer stipends and/or hourly pay for youth in leadership positions to help with recruitment and retention of youth.

Many international organizations pay youth a stipend or hourly wage for their time. Although the wage was often quite small, it represented conscious investment of scarce organizational resources. Stipends, or hourly pay, helped legitimize the role of young people within the organization, created a basis for the organization to hold youth accountable, formally recognized the value of young people's time and commitment, and increased the visibility of youth leaders.

LESSONS AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

Awareness Motives

Critical self awareness and understanding of boarder issues around discrimination, motivates participants to mobilise and take action towards improving their situation.

Sensitisation workshops for non-Dalits/other excluded groups

Ways to build common understanding and support need to be promoted through sensitisation workshops for non- Dalits, local institutions and other youth led groups. The status quo based on deeply embedded caste discrimination and social practices is challenged.

Dalit only groups in the beginning

At the grassroots in the initial stages, Dalit-only groups are more effective than mixed groups for enabling Dalits. It will enable the youth to openly discuss issues, identify and address weaknesses, build on strengths, increase confidence and develop leadership, which can be difficult to establish in mixed groups.

Monitoring the members to ensure participation

Mixed groups need to be monitored to ensure that access and benefits are distributed equally and fairly. More effort is needed to see that Dalits can influence and participate meaningfully in group activities.

Organisation activities should be exclusive

Be aware that organisations can become exclusive in nature. The question of the institutionalisation of Dalit groups/organisations requires further careful reflection and testing. It is important that they are strong and have a feeling of identity and pride. Then again, it is important that institutionalisation does not lead to a new kind of elitism and formality, since such institutions can potentially become exclusive rather than inclusive, and the organisation can become more important than the purpose of the movement itself.

Groups and organisations should keep their activities at a manageable level

It is important not to over-stretch the capacity, responsibilities and expectations of the group or organisation.

Diversification of income generation activities:

Modernisation is displacing many traditional occupations. As ready-made goods flood from china and other countries, we should introduce the other diversified income generating opportunities for the youth.

Working exclusively with Dalits has more immediate impact.

In a recent research done by Swiss Association for International Cooperation, they experienced that working exclusive with Dalits has more impact.

Outside intervention can help people change their attitudes

Dalit youth should give opportunity to engage in external programmes with proper guidance to gain experience and changing the fatalistic attitude of helplessness, so that they

can realise their own potential. This is the point from where a change in perception can begin.

Demonstrating in practice that traditional discriminatory practices are unfounded:

Hiring a Dalit cook in your organisation will create an impact among the members. This action will change and break the practice of segregated eating due to untouchability. When hosting meetings and workshops, this small but effective action helps non-Dalits to realise that taking food and eating with Dalits has absolutely no consequences.

Conclusion:

The pendulum has swung back a bit from a romanticized notion of programmes for “all” youth, to a renewed recognition of the challenging contexts that confront many youth of different races, cultures, ethnicities and sexual orientations. Special attention should be given to build and consolidate the capacity of Scheduled Caste community and other excluded organisations in order to continue with the empowerment process. In mean time, these organizations will need a clear guidance in terms of Organisational vision and Strategy building, Organisational management training and Skill development, Leadership development, Alliance building and Strengthening, Representation and influence at local government level, resource generation and access.

As the organisations get stronger and mature, the external programme can offer opportunities for support through small grants and the potential to implement the activities among them.

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