

## Poverty Alleviation Strategy: Engagement of Indigenous Community-based Groups as Assets towards Community Development

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**ABSTRACT** African people have harnessed various coping mechanisms in managing taxing circumstances in their lives. The majority of people in rural areas are unemployed and poverty stricken. No matter how downtrodden people might be, they always bounce back to normality, expending effort to solve their problems, and seeking to master, minimize and reduce socio-economic challenges. The aim of the present study was to explore and describe how indigenous community-based groups can be effectively engaged as a poverty alleviation strategy. Objectives of the study were to establish which strategies are used to engage community members in developmental projects, and how communities are engaged in decision making processes for developmental purposes. The researchers used a qualitative exploratory research design. A purposive sampling technique was used to select sixty Black African women, age ranges from 18-60 years, irrespective of marital status. The NVivo program was used to manage and organize qualitative data. The responses were transcribed, and translated into English as interviews were held in Northern Sotho. Focus group interviews were held with five groups (N=50) of ten women living in Dikgale, and also in-depth interviews (N=10) were conducted. Indigenous Community-based groups were found to be one of the most empowering community groupings for women living in rural areas and they enhance self-reliance, personal initiative and personal responsibility. There is a need to effectively harness, harmonise and rationalise indigenous community based groups within their indigenous cultures and successful realisation of community development goals and objectives requires the identification and working together with these groups.

### INTRODUCTION

The origin of community development is the origin of humankind and collective activity (Maistry 2012). Nyerere (1973) asserted that people cannot be developed by others; they can only develop themselves. Outsiders may help but outsiders cannot give individuals a sense of pride and self-confidence in themselves as human beings. These are created by individuals through their own actions; by making their own decisions, by increasing their understanding of what they are doing, and why; by their full participation. The journey of community development is an old and long one, if considering its origin to be linked to the origin of humankind and collective activity. The concept of community development has been defined by various scholars in the field of rural and community development. One of the early definitions that are widely accepted was developed by the United States International Cooperation (1956) as cited in Ismail (1999). Ismail (1999) provided a more

comprehensive definition of community development as a process of community activities that are planned and organized in such a way so as to raise the quality of life in the community in terms of economy, social, culture, spiritual and the environment through initiatives and active participation of the community members and with minimum outside help. It emphasized the process where individuals in the community joined forces to plan and take actions regarding community problems. They identify community problems and needs, plan and conduct activities together using available community resources, they also sought outside help from government and private organizations. Further, the United Nations (1975) indicated that community development is a process whereby the efforts of individuals in the community are combined with efforts of government and non-government bodies to improve and develop community socially and economically. These efforts should lead to national development (Jones 1982). This study also referred to definition forwarded by Ploch

(1976). He defined community development as the active voluntary involvement of community residents in a process to improve some identifiable aspects of community life. Ploch, further added that normally such action leads to strengthening of the community's pattern of human and institutional relationship.

Women are at the centre stage of community development and it is so easy for them to congregate and come up with a project. Rao (2012) viewed that women play an important role in the development of human society. Women have long been the mainstay of communities and are heavily involved in community initiatives in various forms. In support of that, Makhubele (2008) contended that women living in rural (indigenous) areas work in groups as individual families constitute clans. They need to be appreciated as they add value and improve the quality of life of people in their localities. Indigenous community based groups are self-propelled social enterprises which are helpful and visible in community events ranging from weddings, funerals, religious events and other family events such as birthday parties and/or 'let us know each other'. These groups are not recognised and supported by both private and public sector institutions, let alone funded as they are not registered as Non-Profit Organizations (NPO), close corporations (cc) or trusts to access funding from government and/or other donors. Working in groups is indigenous to African communities and has far-reaching effects, which reverberate beyond the boundaries of these groups and has historically been an embodiment of the way of life, custodian of customs, traditions and cultures and provide venue where ideals of mutuality, sharing, and giving can be developed. They are community development interventions aimed at meeting social development goals. Since it is an undisputable fact that indigenous African people are by nature highly gregarious, they are of help to each other socially, economically and spiritually during the time of events.

The dynamic nature of coping strategies and resilience necessitates that women from high-risk backgrounds who are functioning adaptively despite experiences of adversity must be studied over time. The majority of people in South Africa is still assailed by health and social problems and as a result remains under-fed, under-housed, under-educated, and vulnerable in spite of government considerable investments in so-

cio-economic development. They try to break away from the entanglements of poverty, disease, famine, inequality and lack of opportunities. South African government, African traditional leaders and other stakeholders have been faced with difficult challenges in their efforts to transform and improve their communities and are constantly searching for better and effective ways to tackle these problems to improve the welfare of their people. It is against this background that efforts are made to understand indigenous communities, groups, institutions, cultures, and value systems as a source for improving the welfare of the people. African values, especially, the latent, unobservable ones culminating into social activities, and referred to as Ubuntu in South Africa have become important factors in socio economic development (Mangaliso and Mangaliso 2006).

### **Background Information**

Hassan and Silong (2008) contended that women have long been the mainstay of communities and are heavily involved in community initiatives in various forms. Though often the unsung heroes of community action, women's role in community development has become increasingly important. In some communities, they have established themselves as leaders in community development and acquired the skills that have brought positive change to their communities. Community development is, therefore, appropriate as an intervention strategy most suited for addressing poverty, and social and economic development (Gray 1996; Patel 2005; Lombard 2008; Swanepoel and de Beer 2006; Weyers 2011). As enshrined in the White Paper on Social Welfare (Ministry of Welfare and Population Development 1997) community development is conceptualized as 'various intervention strategies that combine the efforts of local people with the state to improve socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions in communities' (Patel 2005:45).

Poverty alleviation and eradication in Africa is a three-dimension challenge (Mkabela and Castiano 2010), however, the focus here would be in the first two dimensions. They asserted that the first dimension, which can be coined as the material-economic dimension, entails the production of goods to face hunger and malnutrition and it also involves the access to basic

needs, like clean water and sanitation. The second dimension of the poverty eradication is psycho-social. It advances the position that Africans must use their capacities and capabilities to overcome poverty. This dimension appeals to everyone, individually and collectively to be self-sustainable and not to wait for help by their governments. It encouraged people to grow their own gardens, especially, indigenous plants and breeding their own cattle that can improve their nutrition.

In an attempt to realise community development and poverty alleviation, it should be noted that residual and the institutional models characterised the South African welfare system prior to the introduction of the new dispensation. The "residual model" refers to the concept that each person or family is responsible for his/her or its own welfare. The "institutional model" is in favour of large-scale state intervention, collective involvement, universality of coverage and long-term provision (Midgley 1996; Zastrow 2010). The "social development model" transcends the two models mentioned above by linking social welfare directly to economic development policies and programs (Midgley 1995:1). Social development has brought in a philosophy emphasizing equality of all people, social justice, human rights, access to services, opportunities and resources and more importantly, the new drive towards poverty reduction (Osei-Hwedie 2005; Patel 2005; Becker 2005).

Although, an agreed definition among different authors may not exist, according to Midgley (1995:250) social development is defined as 'a process of planned social change designed to provide the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development'. Dominelli (1997:29) defined Social development also as "...a dynamic way of organizing resources and human interactions to create opportunities through which the potential of all people - individually and collectively can develop to the full." Further, according to Gray et al. (1996:34), social development referred to a process of change starting with an individual's development of confidence, cooperativeness, awareness, and skills. Social development recognised that people's interests are of paramount importance and they have a right to participate in their own development and it enhances a sense of community, which strengthens community bonds through participation in the decision making process by ordinary people (Gray et al.1996). Social development has

brought with it new demands for equality, justice, human rights, effective delivery of services, and more importantly, mass participation and poverty reduction. It is recognized that social development as a community driven process has local, national and international dimensions. Thus, whereas in the African context, the emphasis is usually on using local knowledge, norms, values, and processes, these have to be balanced with, and must take account of, external values and philosophies of development within which the national socio-political and economic activities take place.

It is through indigenous community based groups that the objectives of social development can be realised. Indigenous community-based groups are natural groups. Natural groups are those group which come together spontaneously on the basis of naturally occurring events, interpersonal attractions, or the mutually perceived needs of members (Toseland and Rivas 2005; Becker 2005). Flourishing community growth and development require the effective exploitation, recognition, nurturing and controlling of indigenous structures and working within their cultures in order to appreciate their worthwhile contribution. Conventionally, Western beliefs, concepts and processes have been allowed to unconditionally dictate and control development activities around the world with little consideration for indigenous cultures. Western beliefs, concepts, values and ideas were seen as the only sources of development. However, the importance of other values and norms is evident. Other traditions, as exhibited by Ubuntu, demonstrate that flexibility, understanding and accommodation are critical in all aspects of development. Thus, the challenge for social science practitioners and related professionals is to become familiar with indigenous structures, cultures and their core values, and appreciate and incorporate them in development policies, programs, projects and processes.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

The following two theoretical frameworks were deemed fit for this study:

#### ***Asset-based Approach***

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993:9) defined asset-based approach to community development as a move toward community building that sees community members as active change

agents rather than passive beneficiaries or clients and is relationship driven. Asset-based approach to community development is presented as an alternative to needs-based approaches to development (Mathie and Cunningham 2002). Ebersöhn and Mbetse (2003) asserted that apparent advantages of asset-based approach are ownership, shared responsibility, immediacy, relevancy and practicality of solutions, flexibility, mutual support and a caring environment. Asset-based approach aims to encourage an attitude favourable to change and capacity-building by cutting across professional boundaries. Some consider this to be a community-design process, based on which “the environment works better if people affected by its changes are actively involved in its creation and management instead of being treated as passive consumers” (Sanoff 2000: x).

As an approach to community development, asset-based approach takes as its starting point the existing assets and strengths of community, particularly the strengths inherent in community-based associations and other social networks. A capacity-focused paradigm recognized the skills, talents and gifts of local community members. This approach is fundamentally bottom-up, beginning with what is present in the neighborhood, and inside-out, relying heavily on the efforts of internal agents, such as residents, associations, and institutions. This asset-based approach seeks to identify, and capitalize on, the tangible and intangible assets available to a community, rather than on what it lacks (McKnight and Kretzmann 1996; Mathie and Cunningham 2003).

Social service and human service practitioners should when applying asset-based approach in community development appreciate and mobilize individual and community talents, skills and assets rather than focusing on problems and needs. Communities can be built by focusing on the strengths and capacities (that is the assets) of the citizens who call that community, home. Vital communities are those that accept every member as gifted and provide opportunities for those gifts to be shared. Asset-based approach emphasizes on community-driven development rather than development driven by external agencies. By recognizing the potential of existing skills, resources, and organizational capacity, villagers are in a better position to take advantage of opportunities to diver-

sify their social and economic asset-base. Ebersöhn and Mbetse (2003) indicated that the role of the professional using asset-based approach is that of helping the community to realize, appreciate and utilize their talents and assets.

### *Afro-centrism*

The Afro-centrism (or Afrocentric) perspective in social work acknowledges that African culture and expressions of African values, beliefs, institutions and behaviours are important in social work practice. The Afrocentric paradigm proposes that in African culture, humanity is viewed as a collective endeavour rather than as individual accomplishments. Friendship, compassion, sharing, honesty, courage and self-control are values upheld in African communities for daily living (Daly et al. 1995; Akbar 1984; Asante 1988 as cited in Daniels 2001). Afro-centrism as a paradigm of social services is better appreciated and understood by examining Africa’s traditional themes and associated values that enhance a rich tradition of group consciousness, cohesiveness, and responsibility in matters of social welfare. Afro-centrism proposes that the African economic concept of profit implies a surplus only after the human needs of all in the community have been addressed. In addition, also emphasized, in this context, are three important African tenets, that human identity is understood through an extended kinship system; poverty is unnecessary and intolerable; and government and individual responsibility are mutually dependent and affirmed (Schiele 2000).

Afro-centrism offers a direction for the development processes amongst the Africans. Such a direction must be based on theories, values and technologies emanating from relevant knowledge about Africans themselves. Afro-centrism is consistent with, or accommodative of African values. The fundamental questions rose about the sustainability and desirability of the dominant Western model of development mean that Africans are faced “...with an awesome development challenge” (Baylis and Smith 2005:666). Baylis and Smith (2005: 667) contend that “...if sub-Saharan Africa continues on its current courses, it will take another 150 years to reach the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) target of halving poverty, and the hunger situation continues to worsen there”. Afro-centrism calls for alternative perspectives on develop-

ment and on popular notions of poverty. The orthodox conception of poverty, for instance, referred to a situation where people have no money to buy adequate food or satisfy other basic needs. This understanding has arisen as a result of globalization of Western culture and associated expansion of the market. It is in the context of Ubuntu that asset-based and Afro-centrism approaches become frameworks for development. Thus, in this study the researchers used asset-based and Afro-centrism to guide the research.

### **Problem Formulation**

Traditionally, community affairs and administration has been the domain of men and it was assumed that community development is the male territory. This is evident from the gender imbalance of leaders and office bearers across community, local council and associations. Women have not been active in local politics and are relatively inactive in public processes due to institutional, socio-economic and cultural constraints. However, times are changing. There is now an acceptance that women can and do play a vital role in community development, particularly in contributing to the achievement of community security, development and progress (Hassan and Silong 2008).

Further, according to Chau and Hodge cited in Taylor and Roberts (1985) colonial policies and practice together with the efforts of missionaries underlie the early history of community development in Africa, thereby interlinking education as the main community development intervention and conversion to Christianity. Mass education as an arm of government policy was seen as the beginning of the evolution and the progressive institutionalisation of community development. These early efforts of western education (included health, home life training, industry, agriculture and recreation) as part of community development may be viewed as conversion of the colonised to consumers and market sources for the capitalist economy. As a function of social development, community development was adopted at the Cambridge Summer Conference on African Administration in 1948 to describe a method or approach to local administration. Community development was described as a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the

active participation and on the initiative of the community (Chinn 1960).

Community development in South Africa was viewed with mistrust and scepticism in government circles because of its potential for political change. Community work and not community development, viewed as a method of social work, did not attempt a comprehensive analysis and intervention with communities. Community work supported the apartheid social welfare system by giving effect to the residual model and remedial approach in practice. Social work fostered welfare goals by working with individuals, families/groups and communities in such a way, that they mainly served to maintain the status quo of the apartheid welfare system, thereby trapping the poor in ongoing deprivation (Maistry 2012). The objective of community development is to build healthy functioning communities. This is achieved through interventions for community well-being as identified and driven by the community themselves and to the extent that is required, external support through the provision of resources and services in ways that serve the holistic developmental needs of the community. Community development is distinguished by application of a holistic, rather than a sector, point of view. The community itself participates and takes action, and it is through action that the community becomes more vital, not just economically, but as a strong functioning community in itself. The majority of communities are economically deprived in South Africa and this is where the focus of community development, and correctly so, is currently located (Maistry 2012).

From the above descriptions of community development, it is safe to say that one of the main objectives of community development is to address both the poverty of living and the poverty of life. In agreement with social development from a unitary perspective, then community development strategies and actions need to target not only the material or economic plight of communities, but also the cultural, psychological, political and spiritual components. Clearly, poverty of living and poverty of life deprivations exist in all communities.

Thus, the citizen participation structures that are currently in place are not reaching all sectors within communities, particularly women and youth, whether for reasons of lack of awareness, interest, commuting or working patterns, family

commitments, lack of time and/or resources or otherwise. Public and private authorities sometimes feel that people do not engage to best effect with consultation on strategic policies and only engages at a very late stage when specific decisions are seen to affect the locality. Besides, the people and groups sometimes feel that the public and private authorities do not adequately involve them in the policy-making development in which they wish to engage which can sometimes result in a lack of trust in the institutions. Other challenges that hinder increased community engagement include the need to develop public participation skills for civil society. Lastly, for community development to be a success, public participation need to be balanced between different groups in a community; adjudicating on competing opinions of groups, and between groups and elected members.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the study undertaken was to explore and describe how indigenous community-based groups can be effectively engaged as a poverty alleviation strategy. Objectives of the study were to establish which strategies are used to engage community members in developmental projects and how communities are engaged in decision making processes for developmental purposes.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH**

To obtain an understanding from the perspective of the members of indigenous community-based groups, a triangulation was appropriate as explorative and descriptive was ideal to provide rich information from participants' perceptions and experiences within their natural setting without influencing them in any way (Babbie and Mouton 2001). Further, it was qualitative in nature, thus, providing a better insight into the engagement of indigenous community-based groups as poverty alleviation strategy and to generate possibilities for future research (Babbie and Mouton 2001; Terre Blanche et al. 2006). Individual interviews were used to gain a detailed picture of a participant's beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of a particular phenomenon (De Vos et al. 2010) of which in this case was which mechanisms were used to engage community members in developmental projects,

how communities were engaged in decision making processes for developmental purposes and lastly, what created apathy and mistrust amongst community members towards public and private authorities.

### **Population and Sampling**

Purposive and snow-ball sampling were used in this study. Discussants and interviewees were selected purposively, while others were recruited through snowball sampling. The rationale for purposeful and snowball samples was to target individuals who could provide information to understand the phenomenon of indigenous community-based groups in the context of poverty alleviation strategy and community development. The study population was, thus, limited to the members of indigenous community-based groups, existing and operational not-for-profit organisations and public representatives (elected members at the local levels who are councillors) from rural areas in Limpopo Province. Criterion for selection of communities was based on the fact that there are several projects operational in those communities as they are adjacent to University of Limpopo and funded by both private and public authorities (national and international). Specifically, Vlaamse Inter Universitaire Raad, Flemish Interuniversity Council, Belgium - Inter-University Council, in short, (VLIR-IUC) project is being implemented and the author was the Deputy Project Leader of Project 2. Purposive and Snowball sampling techniques were appropriate to select unique cases that were especially informative for the study and also helped in approaching a single case that was involved in the phenomenon to be investigated in order to gain access and information on other similar persons (Neuman 2006; De Vos et al. 2010). To that end, participants of VLIR Project 2 constituted the sample. In those three communities where VLIR Project 2 was operational, public representatives and members of not-for-profit organisations were all involved as they were few. The Public representatives (councillors) and key informants from not-for-profit organisations operating in those communities were approached who eventually referred the research team to other potential participants. The hope was that each participant would refer the research team to the one he or she has worked with on community development and poverty

alleviation strategies or have knowledge about who is active in community development projects in the community. This qualitative study was ultimately concerned with information richness and not representativeness (Julie et al. 2004). The participants were recruited from Dikgale communities. The Dikgale site is located in the Central Region, Capricorn District, of Limpopo Province, South Africa. It is approximately 40 km from Polokwane, the capital city of the Limpopo Province and 15 km away from the University of Limpopo which is about 30 kilometres east of the provincial capital city, Polokwane, Limpopo Province, South Africa (Alberts and Burger 2002). Only group members who were between 18-60 years were considered for the study and either members of indigenous community-based groups, not-for-profit organisations and public representatives. Thus, only 60 people participated (N=60), for the focus groups (N=5) conducted constituted by 10 members each, and in-depth interviews (n=10) conducted. Each focus group discussion had an assistant moderator.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The structured individual interviews (face-to-face) were conducted with selected persons who were participants of VLIR Project 2, the members of not-for-profit organisations and public representatives in those communities and each referred the research team to the others. This method was selected as it provided an opportunity to minimize variations in the questions posed to the participants and to make sure that all relevant topics are covered (De Vos et al. 2010). The participants were met at the central place, particularly for VLIR Project 2 and appointments were secured with members of not-for-profit organisations and public representatives. The informed consent of participants was obtained prior to data collection. The consent form explained the purpose and nature of the study, gave assurance of anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study. The aim and objectives of the study were explained and they agreed by signing the consent form. Structured individual interviews which had mainly open-ended questions based on the underlying objectives of the study, guided the interview process. The interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants,

transcribed and thematically analyzed. For the research team to verify and maintain accuracy, they were guided by the viewpoints that qualitative data analysis involved bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of information collected (De Vos et al. 2010). Thematic analysis is a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon (Daly et al. 1997). The processes involve the identification of themes through cautious reading and re-reading of the data (Rice and Ezzy 1999). It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis.

### Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from University of Limpopo Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee. Written consent was obtained from participants to conduct the study. A covering letter explaining the purpose of the study and assuring the participants of anonymity and confidentiality was included with the letter. The participants were also informed that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Since, this study was qualitative and employed purposive and snow-ball sampling techniques, the researchers used structured interview schedule to collect data. The data of this study were collected through focus groups discussions and in-depth face to face interviews. To attain social development goals, one needs to understand development. Thus, the development is to create "...human well-being through sustainable societies in social, cultural, political, and economic terms" (Baylis and Smith 2005:650). The achievement of this is through bottom up, participatory and self-reliant approaches and based, in the main, on appropriate (often local) culture and knowledge. Thus, community participation, equity and empowerment become critical aspects of development. These are the values that social service and human service practitioners must seek to restore in all communities, and to find means to encourage and reward such cooperative endeavours as part of the critical effort of building a new society based on a sound value system. Presentation of

the results and subsequent discussions are based on the following two themes:

### **Strategies Used to Engage Community Members in Developmental Projects**

The following strategies came out during data collection processes:

#### ***Stakeholder Mapping***

The service providers or funders with invested interest in the community should identify who to engage. The first step to involving stakeholders in community development projects is identifying who to engage. External people or service providers should identify key stakeholders for consultation prior the actual engagement.

#### ***Solicit Support from Community Leaders***

Community leaders are people who have significant influence within the community. They included not only formal leaders who hold officially recognised roles (for instance, the Chief or Induna), but non-formal leaders such as respected elders, opinion leaders, gatekeepers, and people who have wide networks of friends and other community members whom they influence. It was stated that, the support of both formal and non-formal leaders such as traditional leaders, elected community officials, religious leaders, influential women, and respected elders would enable community development project to achieve positive outcomes for all. In corroboration of the above, the following was echoed:

*“In addition, formal leaders provide needed resources such as land, and play a key role in using their influence to help mobilize various community groups. Formal leaders’ support also confers a sense of legitimacy, which in turn inspire ownership and participation.”*

In support of the above, others stated that:

*“However, it is important not to underestimate the value of support by non-formal leaders as well. Non-formal leaders are opinion leaders who encourage community support for development activities”*

#### ***Cultural Appropriateness in Initial Consultations and Throughout Engagement Process***

It was mentioned that external people when they want to engage indigenous community-

based groups, they must affirm the worth and dignity, self-determination and uniqueness of local people and also embrace culturally appropriate ways of handling community issues and concerns. In case, the project is constituted by members with significant socio-cultural and religious differences, tailored approaches may be needed to ensure that each member is able to raise concerns without fear or favour. It was further mentioned that the women should be enabled to access and participation in the decision-making processes.

The study explored that it was found that, hierarchical communities, families and/or clans with established leadership and representation roles may inhibit full and active participation of all other members. To ensure development of an appropriate mechanism, discuss the objectives of a community development project with key community/family/clan leaders, and seek their support and input upfront.

#### ***Skill in Facilitation***

A good facilitator can create an enabling environment for community engagement. He/she should bear in mind that building community ownership for developmental project is very much about process. This is what they had to say:

*“To them, a good facilitator is the one who possess facilitation skills such as patience, listening, transparency, understanding of the community dynamics, and good timing.”*

In corroboration to have a good facilitator, this was mentioned:

*“For instance, knowing on the basis of practical experience when to slow down a dialogue or draw out different opinions and come up with unitary and acceptable viewpoints to community members.”*

#### **Engagement by Indigenous Community-based Groups in Decision-making Processes**

The participation of the community members in public life and their right to influence the decisions that affect their lives and communities are at the centre of community development. Open and inclusive decision-making increases public participation, enhances transparency and accountability, builds civic capacity and leads to increased buy-in and better implementation.



It is important that open and participatory systems are developed through an open and participatory engagement with interested parties. To this end, all moved towards making decision-making more participative are useful and welcome for community development purposes. It is important to ensure that the local people and other stakeholders are genuinely engaged in shaping the decisions that affect them. It was mentioned that community members or project members should be engaged in decision making processes. If members are engaged in decision-making, they develop a sense of collective responsibility towards community development project. It was echoed that:

*“The role of the external people is that of a capacity builder and funder considering community dynamics and values, and community members are analysts, planners, implementers, assessors, and beneficiaries.”*

External agencies or funders should encourage collective responsibility on the part of community members by intentionally playing facilitative, capacity building roles rather than directive roles. They should not present themselves as the problem-solvers but by stimulating community reflection not only on the problem but on who is responsible for addressing it. Besides, engaging the community members is by eliciting ideas about which resources in the community could help to address the problem. They must avoid practices that could undermine community ownership as that has potential for rejection. This was evident when they mentioned that:

*“They do not want didactic, expert-driven, top-down discussions which are tended to disempower people”*

It was also mentioned that:

*“They need external people or funders who will employ community-centred methods which will stimulate spirit of ownership. Special reference was made to issues of enabling dialogue, discovery, and mutual learning about community development issues in the local setting. They need people who will facilitate dialogue and critical thinking about whose responsibility it is to address the issues and how the community can organise itself to respond in an effective manner rather than top-down approach.”*

Pragmatically, in terms of engagement in decision-making, is the initiative of allowing active

involvement of members of a defined community in at least some aspects of project design and implementation. While participation can occur at many levels, a key objective is the incorporation of ‘local knowledge’ into the project’s decision making processes. Participation is expected to ensure that projects are better designed, benefits better targeted, project inputs delivered in a more cost effective and timely manner, and that project benefits are distributed more equitably and with smaller leakages due to corruption and other rent-seeking activity. Failure to engage members can lead to apathy and mistrust amongst the community members towards public and private authorities.

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Presently, the numbers of indigenous community based groups among Black South Africans in rural communities are growing rapidly. These are normal groups of people who feel they have a common personal problem or concern and have joined together to do something about it a group goes beyond gathering of two or more people who happen to be working together for the same common good at the same time, to be a group, the people must have some commonalities with respect to aim, purpose or function. Group work is based on the concept of solidarity, peer support and mutual aid of and by group members who come together because of a common life experience, common interest or common need. In support of this state that group work is purposeful. It is not a haphazard gathering of people but rather a meeting of individuals who share a common concern, issue or experience which is the reason for them coming together. It is confirmed that, although, group work facilitates individual goal attainment, group work is a mutual aid system.

Further, it is asserted that indigenous community based groups are local initiatives from ordinary communities and have not been given priority by different stakeholders (public and private sectors). It is an undisputable fact that indigenous African people are by nature highly gregarious with a strong sense of belonging to a particular group within the context of the larger society. Equally important, these indigenous community-based groups are not guided by institutionalised policies or rules. They are self-

propelled structures within communities. It is in this sense of belonging that develops into mutual aid or self-help. Thus, it may be concluded that African values such as Ubuntu are useful tools for the development of contemporary African societies. All of these community assets and all aspects of community can contribute to people's engagement and development. The reverse is also true. People can engage and contribute to build each of these assets, and to impact every aspect of community life.

From the above results it can be concluded that the indigenous community based groups are still facing several challenges like recognition. The neglect of African values in the developmental debate and process is misplaced. It is evident that African values of Ubuntu are good for development. As indicated earlier, African people are by nature highly gregarious. The mutual aid tendency, which is so deeply interwoven within the past history of the people, has been maintained in communities up to the present time in spite of all the vicissitudes of history. Through this indigenous community based groups, Black people were able to deal with animosities of apartheid. It is through this formation that people became their own liberators from poverty, famine, diseases and underdevelopment. Indigenous Community-based groups aim at empowering people and discourage complete dependence that destroys striving towards self-reliance, personal initiative and personal responsibility. If we, as social service and human service practitioners, believe in the solidarity and mutual aid embedded in groups, then group work should be considered the most convenient and viable method to apply in an African context as it has been the case with, for the time immemorial.

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