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Community-Based Organizations

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JEEVIKA

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Abstract

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) are mechanisms that encourage individuals to take control of different issues impacting their life, be they economic, social, cultural, environmental or even political. They are meant to supplement and not replace the state, local, territorial laws, rules and regulations. CBOs may also create alternative systems and societal structures outside the established power structures. They are guided by the values of justice, equality, freedom, and fraternity. CBOs are developed from the earlier practices of Community Organisation (CO) and Community Development (CD). Social and solidarity economy organizations and enterprises (SSEOs) has recently become the overarching term connoting all the above terms (including CBOs). After some conceptual clarity, the article elaborates on the origins and development of CO/CBO from the 19th century till today. Then the various types of activities of CBOs are highlighted. In the following section, different organizational structures among CBOs are explained through three examples. In conclusion, both as a process and as a structure, the full potential of CBO is yet to be realized.

Keywords: Community-Based Organisation; Community; Community Development; NGOs; Community Organisation; Community Development

Introduction

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) are mechanisms that encourage individuals to take control of different issues impacting their life, be they economic, social, cultural, environmental or even political. In the context of the increasingly centralizing tendencies of state agencies to deprive individuals of an opinion regarding such issues, there is a need to ensure that not just the marginalized but also the 'ordinary' citizens take centre stage in their own life's concerns. Also, in the context of extreme wealth concentration in a few and the pauperization of many (characterized by increasing jobless growth led by technological inventions in information and communications technology, artificial intelligence and biotechnology) within the neoliberal economy, there is an acute need to find solutions not just to reduce, but to eradicate poverty, or find alternatives to the dominant mode of production, thus enriching human life through empowerment. CBOs encapsulate various attempts in this direction. They occur in geographically, socially, psychologically, culturally, and digitally bounded communities to meet community needs. They are meant to supplement and not replace the state, local, territorial laws, rules and regulations. They also create alternative systems and societal structures outside the established power structures. They are guided by some ideology rooted in humanity and are ultimately based on the values of justice, equality, freedom, and fraternity. CBOs are developed from the earlier practices of Community Organisation (CO) and Community Development (CD). The concepts, 'Community' and 'Development' are very much implied in the concept of CBO.

Box 19.1 Related Concepts: Community Development (CD) and Community Organisation (CO)

Community is a widely-used term with various definitions. It is essentially "formed by people connected to each other in distinct and varied ways" (Walsh 2012, 14). The four main components for defining the concept of the community are: people; place; social interactions; and the idea of common attachment or psychological identification with a community (Christenson 1989, 6). Development has many connotations. It mainly implies improvement, growth, and change (Christenson 1989, 9). There are questions regarding 'Development' whether it is to be measured in terms of overall economic growth or social justice, gender justice, ecological sustainability, human rights, and even happiness.

CO has mainly a connotation of a method or "a way of working on an orderly conscious basis to affect defined and desired objectives and goals" (*Encyclopedia of Social Work in India* 1987, 112). It occurs when "a group of citizens, recognizing a need, band together to see that the need is met" (Government of India 1987, 113). Thus, people have to get together over a problem or a need, form social relationships, develop cooperative attitudes and structures, and work out solutions. There is a distinction between CO and Community Organising, where the former is considered more as a structure with a community perspective and the latter more as a process aimed at creating change. Contemporary CO is known as 'New Community Organising', having globalised perspectives and organizing methods (Wikipedia 2021).

The different phases of CO are: problem (identification); study; diagnosis; treatment; and evaluation. In addition to all these, CO includes the following elements, according to the practitioners and theoreticians of CO in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in the 1980s: "(1) importance... of philosophy, vision or ideology of the kind of a just society worth struggling for, together with a deliberate option and commitment to the poorest of the poor, often leading to living and working with them. (2) Their ability to use the tools of structural analysis on micro and macro levels in analyzing the basic causes of poverty in the situation, identifying, innovating, designing and using indigenous and culture-based communication methods and materials...." (Tellis-Nayak 1987, 118).

From practice, the concept of CO was developed and became a part of teaching subjects in schools of social work. The term "was used in the United States before World War I. It has been taught as a professional practice in American schools of social work since 1940 and Indian schools of social work since the 1950s. However, the Council on Social Work Education (USA) recognized it as a field of specialization only since 1962" (Tellis-Nayak 1987, 112).

James A. Christenson has formulated CD from the various definitions of different authors, including that of the United Nations up to the 1980s. CD is defined as "a group of people in a locality initiating a social action process (i.e., planned intervention) to change their economic, social, cultural, and/or environmental situation." (Christenson 1989, 14). It is viewed in four ways: as a process; a method (process and objectives); a program (method and content); and a movement (program and emotional content) (Christenson 1989, 13).

Thus the two terms, CO and CD, are interrelated and complement each other.

The term CBO is used very loosely by various authors to indicate various groups or organizations. CBOs could simply be called COs or sometimes named community-led/driven organizations. Self-help groups and cooperatives are some specific forms. Usually, civil society organizations (CSOs), voluntary organizations, and non-governmental organizations are differentiated from CBOs. Social and solidarity economy organizations and enterprises (SSEOs) has recently become the overarching term connoting all the above terms (including CBOs).

1. The Origins of and Developments in CO/CBO

The needs of a community and its individuals were addressed during different phases of the development of Western society before the industrial era. In the Global South, various indigenous systems organized - and in some regions continue to organize - the life of the communities. For example, the Indian subcontinent had a village system characterized by a graded caste hierarchy, which governed all life aspects. This system provided many different privileges to the few at the top of the hierarchy while encouraging the exclusion of many by promoting severe indignities to those in the lowest rung. Some basic features of the village system continue to exist even today in rural areas. The essentials of the caste system are still to be found in rural areas and urban localities, and the Indian diaspora worldwide. The Industrial Society had sprung

up new forms of inequality, resulting in acute poverty for the many propertyless, who exist only on labour, and wealth for a few propertied class people. Gender inequalities were also part of the system. In the neo-liberal global era, the social and environmental consequences have become enormous. Different CO efforts have taken place from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution to address these issues.

The first CO efforts that emerged were for charity and relief to overcome the problem of acute poverty leading to beggary and provide settlement houses for the rural poor who flocked into the cities. These efforts appeared first in the UK during the nineteenth century and then subsequently in the US. Community councils sprang up in the US in the early 20th century "to increase efficiency, encourage specialization, set standards for service and provide leadership to member agencies for joint planning. Later, World War I gave rise to war chests in many communities to promote fundraising, coordination of services, and spending control" (Tellis-Nayak 1987, 113). Thus from the 1920s to the 1950s, CO came to be considered working with member agencies for the above services and not directly with communities.

Gradually, government public welfare departments took up welfare activities, and the focus was shifted from the voluntary effort to institutionalized welfare departments of government. CO was also restricted when casework became prominent in social work. Since the 1950s, developing countries have carried out CD Programmes under the auspices of the United Nations, alongside consultants from national governments and academic experts from the Western world. Previously, the CD was used for colonial domination in Nigeria, with Batten radically attempting to give rise to CD as a result of his training between 1927 and 1949 (Ledwith 2005, 9).

During the late 1960s, urban renewal projects and the war on poverty refocused on direct services to people and communities (Tellis-Nayak 1987, 113). There was a surge in organizing people for radical change in Latin America and the Philippines. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first published in Portuguese in Brazil in 1967 and then in English in Great Britain in 1970, set the tone for radical CO worldwide. Freire "has made more impact than any other thinker on community development worldwide since the 1970s." (Ledwith 2005, 53). The main focus was on the increasing agency of individuals and communities to produce a radical change in various domains, including the political sphere. There was a surge of CBOs and peoples' movements worldwide, attempting to restructure society through peaceful means radically. This occurred, particularly in the Global south.

The 1990s saw the emergence of neoliberalism with emphasis on worldwide structural transformation and globalization, catering to the needs mainly of capital. Even the communist regimes were affected by these trends. The wealth produced is increasingly concentrated in a few, and the vast majority are marginalized, having enormous social and environmental consequences. Issues of gender justice and child rights came to the forefront. Such trends have initiated the development of many types of CBOs in rural and urban areas, not only in the Global South but also in most Western countries. The projects funded by Western governments, the World Bank and other international financial institutions also started supporting various projects through partnerships with government and NGOs, with a deliberate emphasis on collaboration with CBOs. Where CBOs were initially concentrated in rural areas, urban-based CBOs became more

common. Governments, UN agencies and NGOs have realized the importance of promoting CBOs throughout all project phases. In Western countries, especially in the US, local governments and professional institutions carry out their services in collaboration with CBOs. This is mainly in healthcare, especially of the elderly and the disabled, and during epidemics such as Covid-19.

In this context, the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization in 2008, which called "for the promotion of Social Economy Organizations within a pluralist economy" (Fonteneau et al. 2011, vii), indicates a renewed interest of the ILO in the social economy and its impact on CBOs. From its beginning in 1920, through setting up a Cooperative Branch, the ILO" has built a long tradition and developed thorough expertise on SSE enterprises and organizations (SSEOs)" (Fonteneau et al. 2011, vi). The first reference to the SSE in an ILO document was in 1922 in the 11th Session of the Governing Body proceedings. The concept of 'social finance', covering various microfinance institutions and services, was developed in the 1980s. The ILO began promoting community-based protection schemes and mutual benefit societies in the area of social protection in the 1990s. More recently, the ILO has become involved in the promotion of 'social enterprises' and 'social entrepreneurship' through its Recommendations on Job Creation in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and on Promotion of Cooperatives (Fonteneau et al. 2011, vi). The concepts of SSE and SSEOs are now an integral part of ILO initiatives and programmes such as: the Social Protection Floor Initiative; labour intensive programmes; ecotourism and fair trade; support to indigenous minorities; local economic development projects; the fight against HIV/AIDS; the promotion of green jobs; and, more broadly, sustainable enterprises (Fonteneau et al. 2011, vii).

2. Various areas of activities of CBOs

CBOs can be grouped into broad categories, including income generation, service providing, human rights, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), environment, or a combination of two or more of these categories. Income generation could be carried out by micro-enterprises through collectives like self-help groups (SHGs) or cooperatives, enhancing agricultural production, animal husbandry and so on. The services related to education, skill enhancement, recreation, events and gatherings, youth sports, home visiting, health, food, water, sanitation, children, vulnerable children, orphans, women, domestic violence, the elderly, the disabled, the homeless, immigrants, refugees, victims of natural and human-made disasters, vulnerable individuals at higher risk of severe illness, HIV/AIDS, pandemics like Covid-19, and so on. The various human rights and entitlements addressed by various CBOs include gender issues, child rights, indigenous people, racial and caste affected groups, communities carrying out descent & caste-related occupations, forced labour and trafficking, accessing entitlements from the state agencies, implementing various government welfare programmes, peace issues regarding communal harmony and arms conflict, and so on. Environmental issues dealt with by CBOs include conservation of forests, planting trees, conservation of wildlife, protection of common property resources, watershed management, conservation of water and water bodies, replacing plastics and so on. Some CBOs participate in the local governance structures to encourage participation in self-governance.

The CBOs in the Global South, including most of the countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa, mainly concentrate on the various income generation activities, agricultural production, animal husbandry, human rights, peace, harmony and environmental issues, as well as education and health. These activities are mainly promoted by NGOs. UN agencies also promote CBOs through collaboration with government agencies. In the US and European countries, they are mainly concentrated on service providing in health and education. Professional institutions, both independent or extensions of universities and local governments, deliver their services mainly in collaboration with CBOs.

Of late, marginalized communities or individuals with specific needs have taken their own initiative to form CBOs to secure their rights or entitlements. They could be specifically termed Community-Led/Driven Organizations. Spontaneous movements sometimes get formalized into CBOs. Citizens or community leaders concerned for issues affecting their communities or with a radical ideology may inspire their community members to come together, forming organized groups with a clear plan of action to address various social, environmental or human rights concerns and, more significant societal issues. They may also initiate the development of local SSEOs.

3. Organizational Structure of CBOs

Most of the CBOs are promoted by NGOs or CSOs. Some enlightened and motivated leaders from communities may themselves promote CBOs within their communities. CBOs are formed either: within a village or a larger geographical region; at a particular community level; between segments of the community such as women, men, youth, girls and children; or to address particular issues. A CBO could be a single unit or a federation of many units. Each CBO has a few selected leaders. The NGO-promoted CBOs are likely to be more structured and very well formalized compared to those that emerge from the innate leadership within communities. The NGOs which promote the CBOs provide constant training on leadership and management, carrying out group meetings, keeping records, identifying issues to be addressed, addressing such issues, and reviewing or evaluating CBOs periodically. To ensure ownership and sustainability, the members pay regular fees. All CBO leaders may be more motivating when compared to managers of organizations that work to set targets, however, the leaders of CBOs from within communities are more inspirational than those from NGO-promoted CBOs. These Community-Led/Driven CBOs are likely to be more informal, setting up structures as the need arises and learning from their own experience addressing their issues.

Below is an example of an NGO, Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development (CORD), promoting various CBOs as its mechanism to deliver various services in villages in different states in India.

Box 19.2: Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development (CORD)

CORD, originating in Himachal Pradesh in India and now spread to other states such as Odisha and Tamil Nadu, has CBOs of women, men, youth, and children. These CBOs, particularly the women's groups, are the heart of CORD's constituent programs and, around these CBOs, other programme components evolve.

Each CBO elects its President, Secretary, and, if required, a Treasurer. They learn to conduct monthly meetings, maintain records of finances, delegate responsibilities, establish priorities, and resolve multiple issues. Besides their active role in decision-making and taking up responsibilities, their ownership in the CBO is established further by a small donation (denoted Chanda) of Rs. 2 to Rs. 10 per month per member. They are empowered to access funds directly from the government. Once these CBOs are nurtured in each village ward for various issues, they are encouraged to participate in local self-governance, first in the Up-gram Sabha at each of the wards in a Gram Panchayat and then at the Gram Sabha of the Gram Panchayat.

The CBOs nurtured since 1985 include Mahila Mandals (Women's Groups), Self Help Groups, Men and Farmers' Clubs, Adolescent Girls' Groups (Yuvathi Samuh), Children's Groups (Bal Vihar), Advocacy Groups, Chinmaya Umang for the persons with disability, single women groups, women in agriculture and local self-governance, people with old-age, promotion of education through school management committees, etc. CBOs also focus on promoting health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation through government promoted groups such as the Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNC). CORD also offers youth leadership programmes(CORD 2021).

Government Agencies, on their own or through the support of International Agencies like the World Bank, UNDP and so on, carry out various projects in partnership with local NGOs, who, in turn, directly build up CBOs to carry out the project or link with other NGOs to deliver various services through CBOs. Below is an example of a partnership in the late 1990s between the Gujarat Government, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), six NGOs and the CBOs they promoted to run a water and sanitation programme in the slums of Ahmedabad in Gujarat. The World Bank supported it.

Box 19.3: Partnership of CBOs

The Approach Paper to the 9th Five Year Plan of the Government of India, the Country's Economic Memorandum of the World Bank and the Government of Gujarat envisaged the involvement of CBOs in most urban programs. The AMC planned to build partnerships with six NGOs, which, in turn, promoted many CBOs in a range of projects, including Parivartan. Some NGOs were working directly with CBOs, while some were working through other NGOs to support those CBOs. The six NGOs included the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Mahila Housing SEWA Trust (MHT), VIKAS, Foundation for Public Interest (FPI), CHETNA and SAATH. Each is described below:

Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a membership-based CO working for the economic development of poor women for over 40 years. Work is focused on local income and employment generation needs. SEWA identifies local women leaders and connects poor women by promoting peoples' organizations. This focus on women leaders and connection among women facilitates poor women's access to urban resources, policies, and programs. SEWA also builds the capacity of CBOs through training, organizing support services, savings, credit, and policy development.

Mahila Housing SEWA Trust (MHT), a subsidiary organization of SEWA, was formed to meet the need for housing-related services. MHT developed a unique tool called 'Housing Clinics' for the community, which facilitates easier access to housing finance and social security schemes, raises awareness about housing-related schemes and initiates participatory capacity-building within the community (See the entry "Housing sector and SSE"). MHT worked in 12 of the 18 slums and was upgraded within the Parivartan program. Besides motivating the members of each slum community to participate in the program through their one-third cash contribution, MHT also facilitated linkages between all the partners and coordinated the overall up-gradation process. Additionally, MHT helps form Community Associations within each slum and enables the community to organize the Associations into electing a Working Committee, which carries out day-to-day functions, including the operation and maintenance of the services by the Parivartan program.

With its many years of experience working with CBOs in Ahmedabad, VIKAS responds to the needs of CBOs and promotes decision-making through democratic structures. It motivates CBOs to work for basic urban needs through the LINK project. It has a directory of 304 CBOs in Ahmedabad slums and was also involved in establishing the Urban Resource Center.

Foundation for Public Interest (FPI) has dual experience in small towns like Idar and large cities like Ahmedabad. Linking up of CBOs with the state and city governments is FPI's main focus, along with the joint CBO-NGO government policy formulation. FPI also trains CBOs and develops planning and monitoring tools.

CHETNA provides training and develops training materials for CBOs for health and education activities. It focuses on coordination between CBOs and the government and sensitizes CBOs to local urban issues, particularly health, education and women. CHETNA also advocates simplifying policies that affect women and their economic status. Sanchetana, a subsidiary organization of Chenta, promotes local groups and CBOs of women and minorities. It provides training to CBOs on health, savings and credit and aims to raise awareness amongst CBOs of social issues such as alcoholism, corruption and social injustice. Dissemination of official information to local CBOs is an expanding activity.

SAATH has formed CBOs in several Ahmedabad slums. It concentrates on youth development and focuses on the creation of social awareness. SAATH supports activities for savings and credit and disseminates information to communities. AMC has been successfully working with the CBOs involved in Parivartan and was planning to involve more CBOs in future urban management programs.
(Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation 1998)

Some general trends and suggestions for improvements in a CBO partnership were articulated at a workshop organized by AMC in 1998. They are still relevant today for any CBO partnership. They are the following (Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation: 1998):

4. General Trends in CBOs

- Rural and urban CBOs function differently. In rural areas, issues of caste, religion or occupation are more common, while in urban areas, CBOs are mainly formed based on minority, ethnicity and locality of migrants;
- At times of crisis like riots, floods, etc., defunct CBOs revive themselves;
- It is challenging to organize women as active members of CBOs;
- Male leadership is common in CBOs, while women make most of the operational decisions;
- Except in savings and credit groups, mismanagement of funds is common when amounts handled become larger;
- CBOs are good at marketing and building marketing links for income-generating activities;
- There is a lack of information about the government's plans and policies and the availability of essential services among CBOs, feedback from the community to government policies is very limited, and mechanisms for the dissemination of information to CBOs are lacking;
- Political events like elections cause seasonal orientation changes;
- There is a mismatch of CBO, NGO and government activities;
- There is a lack of coherence in policies, programmes and resources at state and city levels;
- There is no coordinated information for CBOs in city and state governments.

5. Suggestions for Improvements in CBOs

Since working with CBOs can be complex, it requires a high degree of flexibility on the part of the partners involved;

- Local settlement needs should be reflected in the programme;
- CBOs need to link with other CBOs;
- There is a great need for capacity building in leaders and among members of CBOs;
- Investment of time by partners to gain the trust of the CBO members is essential, especially when dealing with finances;
- Partners must recognize the seasonality of the flow of finance at the community level;
- The complicated policies, rules and regulations of governments hampering CBOs should be simplified and made accessible to CBOs.

Apart from the NGO/CSO and government or international agency-sponsored CBOs, many CBOs emerge from within the communities or the affected groups of people. They might get formalized or continue to function as informal groups purely based on the leadership from the community or the affected groups of people or funded by the community or the group. These are more like movements since they mainly work on rights, justice and environmental issues and undertake various types of struggles, agitations and advocacy associated with the community or the affected groups of people. They may also address the economic security of the community or the group members. Some movements may take on the features of CBO (see the entry "Activism, social movements and SSE"). Apart from providing leadership, management and administrative skills training, strengthening the community's social capital, meaning networks of civic engagements engendering societal norms of reciprocity and trust, is

of primary importance (Saxton 2007, 1). An example is given below of JEEVIKA, a movement on bonded labour in India.

Box 19.4: JEEVIKA – Jeeta Vimukti Karnataka (Bonded Labour Liberation Karnataka), India

JEEVIKA is a movement on bonded labour that started in Karnataka, India and is now spread to the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh. It follows a human rights approach and addresses fundamental rights associated with bonded labourers and Dalits and Moolanivasis from which most bonded labourers come. It promotes the agency of the bonded labourers through awareness-raising and organization building. Using scientific data and through advocacy and lobbying, it aims to bring policy changes at the highest levels of governance and tries to bring about systemic change. While doing all these, it also secures the economic interests of bonded labourers through promoting CBOs like the Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Cooperatives.

The movement began with the initiative of one individual who identified himself with the Dalits and the Moolanivasis in villages and through the cooperation of youth from those communities. Though clear on strategies and broad approaches to be followed, a detailed plan of action was not formulated beforehand. The issues and the concrete programmes and activities emerged as the movement spread. Not just bonded labourers but also Dalits and Moolanivasis have emerged and are emerging to take leadership in the movement. More and more freed bonded labourers lead independent and dignified lives through their CBOs (Prasad 2022).

Conclusion

The concept CBO evokes noble sentiments regarding people's affirmation and agency. It refocuses people as the central factor in the development and societal structure. Without their participation, without their full involvement, without their taking ownership, without them taking decisions, no programme of government, NGOs or any society can be successful. From charity and relief work to welfare and poverty eradication programmes, from service deliveries to rights-based actions, to gender justice, to environment protection and ecological sustainability, CO/CBO has taken many forms and continues to manifest in newer forms. There are many varieties of CBO. Because of the high valorization of CBO, there is a trend of calling any NGO or CSO as CBO. Since it is realized that no programme for whatever purpose can be effectively implemented without people in the centre, many NGOs, CSOs, governmental agencies, various international bodies, and so on incorporate the formation of CBOs as a primary strategy of carrying out their projects. Both as a process and as an entity, the full potential of CBO is yet to be realized.

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