

Only Through Community: A Case Study of the St. Martin Approach - The Lens of Transforming Communities from the Inside Out

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Abstract

In 1999, the St. Martin Catholic Social Apostolate in Kenya was founded with the mission of building a strong capacity among community members so as to empower and care for vulnerable groups of people in the community. In the implementation of its activities, the organization utilizes the St. Martin Approach. The aim of this paper is to present a case study of the St. Martin Approach as a model on which social transformation can be achieved in communities. The St. Martin Approach uniquely incorporates different participatory approaches to development initiatives so as to bring about change in the communities. The Approach as an envisioned model targets the abled members of the community who become volunteers in aiding those who are vulnerable in the community. The St. Martin Approach achieves community objectives through the people and as the community members are actively placed at the centre of the approach.

Keywords: Development, Participation, Social Transformation, St. Martin Approach

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1 Introduction

Participation is a concept which was intricately focused on in the 1970s by Paulo Freire in response to the criticism of the modernization and dependency paradigms of development (Ledwith & Springett, 2010). As the concept of participation continued to evolve, there was a realization that the top-down approach did not achieve the reforms that government and donors anticipated for communities in developing countries. As such, there was a deliberate and conscious pursuit for sustainable development in the communities which led to the insight that a bottom-up approach and emphasis on the interests of the local people would bring about the needed changes.

In the development context, participation aims to empower individuals in any given community who are disadvantaged and gives them the power to take control of their lives (Hassenforder et al., 2016). Participation is a process in which the local people in a community use their power so as to decide on issues concerning their community. Therefore, the local populations are seen not as targets for development initiatives but also as development actors. The people are involved in the holistic search and resolve of social transformation in their local context. The people own the process for the change and along the way they gain tools for decision-making in making decisions independent of outside forces even if the forces are involved in the social transformation process, it is the people who make the decision.

As development actors, the people are engaged meaningfully and they are accountable for their actions in development initiatives. The use of indigenous knowledge is also vital in ensuring that the initiative undertaken takes into consideration the local context. In the process of participation, people become empowered. The epitome of empowerment in participation is to bring about social transformations; whereby groups in any given society that are excluded such as women, youth, and those who are differently-abled can partake in the decision-making process on matters that concern them. This process involves building capacities in which the people are able to gain skills and knowledge to improve their lives (Chambers, 2013; Mansuri & Rao, 2012).

Participation, in the development inquiry, revolves around participatory methodologies which is an umbrella term for behaviours, attitudes, and even approaches (Chambers, 2013). As presented by Gaynor (2013), participation is an amorphous yet ubiquitous concept. This is especially true when thought is cast to the conception of participatory approaches to development in which many methods, techniques and ideologies have over the years been presented, discussed and explored in the scholarly and development dialogues. In community-based development, there is the existence of different dimensions of participatory approaches to development such as needs-based approach, asset-based approach, rights-based approach, and participatory learning and action.

Participatory approaches involve individuals at all levels in the public domain being engaged in the setting of agenda, decision-making, and other activities involved in policy formation. In the recent past, different participatory approaches have continued to be accepted in the development discourse as important elements of policies and programs which support in decision-making and learning. The practicality of participatory approaches often indicates that the approaches used are as a result of predetermined objectives and goals which are imposed in developing communities by donors. This brings in the aspect of different levels of participation which can include information, consultation, dialogue, and involvement (Calogero, Flores, Biscan, & Jarrot,

2017).

On the information level, people are only provided with information on a development initiative and the information moves from top to bottom levels of the community. The information-sharing process involves a number of actors. On the consultation level, the people are given an opportunity to express their views, opinions, needs and expectations. When the voices of the people are heard and acted upon, the development process becomes fair and there is equitable distribution of development initiative benefits. On the dialogue level, all actors of the development initiative exchange knowledge and skills as well as collaborate for the success of the development initiative. The final level of participation is involvement and this requires the development initiative actors to be actively involved in all processes of the initiative. Chambers (2013) asserts that the participation level in which the whole community is involved in the identification, planning, implementation and evaluation of initiatives is a catalyst of development.

In the African context, local participation is a two-way approach; top-down and bottom-up. In the top-down approach, the government and other agencies seek to bring about development and involve the local people while in the bottom-up approach, the people take initiative. The use of the approach depends on the perspective and environment in which a development initiative is implemented. For instance, a study by Chambers (2013) indicates that in Eastern Africa, countries such as Kenya, the people take initiative for self-help. The self-help approach is based on an extraction view which provides opportunities for development whereby resources are exploited by the community for the benefit of the community.

2 Theoretical Framework

This case study aims to examine the St. Martin Approach model in a bid to understand its working in the development of local community initiatives. For this study, a broad approach of the theoretical framework is undertaken which focuses on social theories so as to provide an understanding of participatory approaches to development. As a concept, participation seeks to bring about the transformation of communities. In fact, Ledwith & Springett (2010), note that for any community development initiative to take place, participation is essential. Therefore, any participatory approach to development that is initiated well translates to transformative change.

The theory of transformative action focuses on the current context and what particularly needs to be changed. As asserted by Jemal & Bussey (2018), the theory of transformative action has three levels: destructive action, avoidant action, and critical action. The destructive action level occurs when action is taken intentionally or unintentionally by people to deal with issues that they may have. Avoidant action is when people choose to ignore issues and choose to maintain the status quo. The final level is the critical action where individual purposively and intentionally focus on addressing issues of inequity in society. Critical action also helps to identify changes that are needed which go beyond the individual level. Transformative action connects an individual and the community (Jemal & Bussey, 2018). Hence, when critical action is taken for instance at the individual level, it will influence the community which will, in turn, influence the society.

Individuals, through transformative action, are able to critically think about their situations, identify their needs and using the transformation lens be able to decipher what they want and how they can get there. Collective action is important to achieve transformative action objectives (Corcoran, Pettinicchio, & Young, 2015). The objective of an outsider in achieving transformative change is to ensure that the local people achieve sustainable development. Social transformation takes place when action is taken by individuals and the community to direct their capabilities to participate in development initiatives. In action-taking, it is possible to comprehend the depth of a problem when some form of action is put together to confront the problem.

For transformational development to take place, participation is an important aspect. Additionally, the community should be able to identify its strengths and weakness. According to Max Neef's model of human-scale development, communities have to go through a process through which they are able to identify their 'wealths' as well as their 'poverties'. Furthermore, communities should be able to identify how to meet and satisfy their needs (Rodzoś, 2019). Human beings have needs which are objective and constantly held across time periods and cultures. However, the way the needs are satisfied varies depending on time cultures. These needs are systems in that they are interrelated, interactive and interconnected. This human-scale development model holds that the human needs are protection, subsistence, understanding, affection, participation, identity, creation, leisure and freedom. The ways of meeting the needs are known as satisfiers and can be classified in the categories of being, having, doing and interacting (Büchs & Koch, 2019).

From understanding the human scale development and analyzing the needs of the people, the appropriate transformative action can take place. This leads to individuals coming up with different ways of self-organizing and self-learning. They play a leading role in identifying, planning and implementing of development initiatives. As a result, there is a process of capital accumulation which does not necessarily involve financial capital but it also involves social capital.

Transformative action requires objectives that are specific and clear so as to avoid misunderstandings and

disappointments that may arise in the planning and implementation of initiatives. The mechanisms used should be clarified and every actor involved should understand their roles and responsibilities. This enhances collective action and opens up spaces which allow different actors to interact so as to co-create the required solutions through making decisions from a point of knowledge (Corcoran et al., 2015).

3 Methods

3.1 Context and Study Area

St. Martin Catholic Social Apostolate (CSA) which is a fully-fledged trust which was founded in 1999 at Nyahururu town which is an urban area found in Laikipia County, in the north-central part of Kenya. The organization has a mission of building capacity and solidarity among the communities. The organization focuses on using the talents and resources of those who are deemed as abled in the community so as to help the vulnerable. Through a bottom-up management style, the organization uses a circular organizational structure which ensures the promotion of equality and partnership in the organization as no one is placed above the other (St. Martin CSA, 2019).

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The aim of this paper is to present a case study of the St. Martin Approach as a model on which social transformation can be achieved in communities. In order to achieve this, a qualitative approach was utilized so as to gain in-depth information on the St. Martin Approach. The population of the study included the St. Martin staff, beneficiaries, and volunteers. Purposive sampling was used to select participants of the study. Primary and secondary data were utilized to provide a triangulation of data collected. The data was collected between February 2019 and April 2019. For the secondary data, the organization's documents were reviewed. These documents included the organization's strategic plans, policies, the participatory evaluation process evaluation report, and the St. Martin Approach evaluation report. To collect the primary data, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KII), and semi-structured interviews were used. The semi-structured interviews focused on the organization's staff and beneficiaries while the FGDs focused on the volunteers. The key informant interviews focused on the top management of the organization. Interviews were transcribed and content analysis was used to analyze the data.

3.3 Analytical Framework

This paper looks at the St. Martin Approach and its implementation in achieving social transformation through the community. An analytical framework based on the activities of the St. Martin Approach is presented in Figure 1. First, the Approach makes use of the abled in the community who act as volunteers to help the vulnerable in the community. Transformative action by the collective is used to bring about changes in the lives of the vulnerable. The St. Martin Catholic (CSA) empowers and assists in the creation of awareness on the plight of the vulnerable in the community.

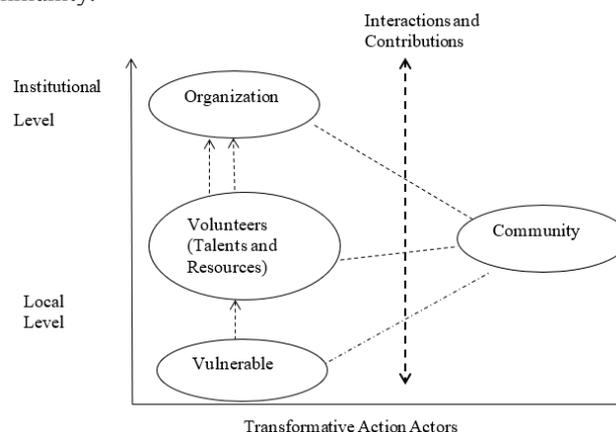


Figure 1: Analytical Framework

4 Results

This case study took a best practice case study typology which focused on the St. Martin Approach. The study focused on different aspects of the St. Martin Approach and revealed that the implementation of the Approach is a process which has an 'inside-out' perspective on the community. The foundation of the approach is that social transformation can be achieved only through the community. The results revealed that the Approach has interactions at two main levels: local level and institutional level.

4.1 St. Martin Approach at the Local Level

The St. Martin Approach uses volunteers who are abled individuals in the community to identify the vulnerable in the community. The volunteers come from diverse backgrounds and there is no discrimination as to who can be a volunteer in the program. Thereafter, a systematic process is undertaken to assess the issues and verify them. The volunteers, together with the community members at large, then collaborate to find solutions on how to help the vulnerable.

Many participatory approaches focus on pragmatic and humanitarian considerations (Chambers, 2013). However, the St. Martin Approach 'goes beyond the humanitarian consideration to holistic considerations of human development'³⁸. The St. Martin Approach in an integrated model of the participatory approaches to development. It amalgamates approaches such as capability-based, needs-based, value-based, asset-based, and right-based approaches. The use of the community has the capability of bringing about sustainability for the approach.

4.2 St. Martin Approach at the Institutional Level

There is the interlinking of strategic aspects of the organization with the St. Martin Approach. This ensures that there is a clear distinction of the organization's vision, mission and objectives. The organizational structure is rather circular with different aspects of the organization being organized in circles that are concentric around the centre. At the centre of the circle is formation and care in which all stakeholders are given spiritual and technical formation so that they can be able to care and empower the beneficiaries. At the core of the structure is formation and care from which beneficiaries and then the community lie. The leadership of the organization is through the board, directors and trustees. There are also associates who collaborate closely with the organization and they include L'Arche Kenya, Talitha Kum, and Fondazione Fontana. There are two main categories of departments that operate in the organization. There is the support department which comprises of the community mobilization, training and facilitation, human resources, and public relations. There is also the logistics department which consists of the secretariat, properties, transport and accounts (St. Martin CSA, 2019). At the institutional level, the St. Martin Approach is incorporated with the four main community programmes undertaken by the St. Martin Approach CSA. The programmes include Community Programme for Children in Need (CPCN), Community Programme for People with Disability (CPPD), Community Programme for Addiction & Mental Health, and Community Programme for Peace & Reconciliation (CPPR).

4.3 Best Practices

Success and sustainability for the use and adaptation of the St. Martin Approach can be achieved through the use of the community. The St. Martin Approach involves a process of understanding the community and its people. The use of volunteers from the communities makes it easier to identify the issues in the community and their solutions which results in community solidarity. Volunteers allow for the use of indigenous knowledge in driving the transformative agenda in the communities. *"The programmes undertaken by the organization are different and they are implemented in different communities but the fundamental workings of the St. Martin Approach remain the same"*³⁹. This shows that the Approach has contextual flexibility.

Ultimately, the strength of the St. Martin Approach lies in the view that nobody is a liability and everyone in the community has something that they can offer to bring about needed transformations in the community. Also, the approach focuses on the ecumenical spiritual formation which promotes love and care among the community members. *"People from all walks of faith are involved in bringing change to the community. This means that even in communities that are deeply rooted in faith- regardless of the faith affiliation are able to use the St. Martin Approach"*⁴⁰.

Additionally, the St. Martin Approach has been replicated and is used by organizations such as L'Arche Kenya and Talitha Kum which are associates of the St. Martin CSA. The adaptation of the Approach is tailor-made to fit the organizations' leadership, administration, and ideologies.

5 Conclusion

The St. Martin Approach provides a model for social transformation which seeks to transform communities from the inside-out. The Approach is an integrated model of different participatory approaches to development. Through transformative action, the St. Martin Approach brings about collective action of the different community members and other stakeholders to provide solutions to problems faced in the community. The dynamism of the approach has allowed contextual flexibilities which can help in the adaptation of the St. Martin Approach as a model for social transformation.

³⁸ Interview, Key Informant, February 15, 2019

³⁹ Interview, Key Informant, February 6, 2019

⁴⁰ Focus Group Discussion, February 8, 2019.

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