



The Role of NGOs in Promoting Empowerment for Sustainable Community Development

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ABSTRACT: *This paper attempts to illustrate the contribution of NGOs towards sustainable community development. NGOs have many programs, functions and roles which assist community to become empowered, and eventually attain sustainable development. This paper reviews some of these roles, functions and programs of NGOs, such as microfinance, capacity building and self-reliance. Microfinance programs improve the economic well-being of communities by job creation and income generation. In the long run, this economic empowerment will contribute to sustainable community development. NGOs, through capacity building, develop community capacities such as ability, skill and knowledge of mobilizing resources, planning and evaluating community initiation and solving problems to gain the mastery over their lives. It also motivates the community to participate in the projects and help them to improve quality of their lives. Participants are expected to coordinate meetings, plan community activities, and be practical in community initiatives. In this way, NGOs contribute towards sustainable community development. Furthermore, NGOs mobilize the communities to be self-reliant. It assists the communities to discover their own potentials and rely on their own resources. In short, this paper demonstrates that all these programs and functions of NGOs could contribute towards the realization of sustainable community development.*

Key words: NGOs, Empowerment, Sustainable, Community. Resources

Introduction:

In the last decade, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have gained increased attention among scholars and practitioners of development. They have become increasingly important agents of the development process in the countries of the South, in all of their main areas of work such as humanitarian relief, long-term development, policy formation and political advocacy (Attack 1999). On the other hand, there is a current view that NGOs constitute a viable alternative to government as channels of development assistance, particularly in developing countries. Some of the NGOs' functions

and advantages, according to Streeten (1997) are

1. They are good at reaching and mobilizing the poor and remote communities;
2. They help empower poor people to gain control of their lives, and they work with and strengthen local institutions;
3. They carry out projects at lower costs and more efficiently than the government agencies and
4. They promote sustainable development. In this article two aspects will be discussed, first, the

relationship between NGO and empowerment as a particular virtue of NGOs, and second, the strategy and program undertaken by NGOs that contribute to sustainable community development.

Literature Review:

NGOs are professionally-staffed organizations aiming at contributing to the reduction of human suffering and to the development of poor countries (Streeten 1997). They do this in various ways, e.g. by funding projects, engaging in service provision and capacity building, contributing to awareness, and promoting the self-organization of various groups (Baccaro 2001). Meanwhile, Desai (2005) has mentioned that NGOs have an important role to play in supporting women, men and households, and expected that they can meet the welfare. She accounted some role and functions for NGOs, such as counseling and support service, awareness raising and advocacy, legal aid and microfinance. These services help

the people to achieve their ability, skill and knowledge, and take control over their own lives and finally become empowered. On the other hand, Stromquist (2002) has noted three major functions for NGOs such as (1) service delivery (e.g. relief, welfare, basic skills); (2) educational provision (e.g. basic skills and often critical analysis of social environments); and (3) public policy advocacy.

Through the functions of providing microfinance, initiating capacity building and self - reliance, NGOs could promote empowerment among community members, and eventually community sustainable development.

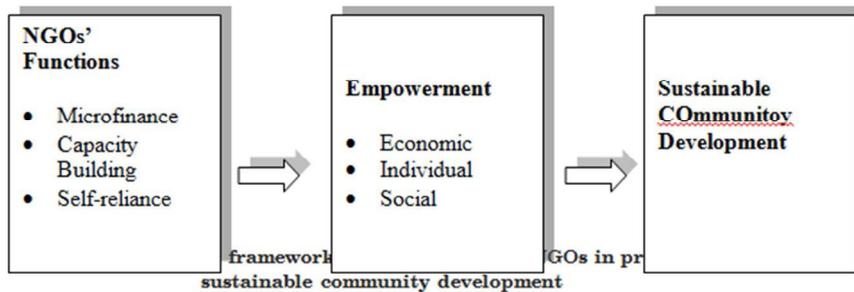


Fig. 1. Theoretical framework of the functions of NGOs in promoting sustainable community development

Figure 1 shows the outline of the relationship between NGOs' functions, empowerment and sustainable community development. From this perspective, NGOs' functions in

community development are, among others, develop the local production and local markets; help the community to develop the social, capital and human resources; increase the knowledge and



skills; encourage people to participate in activities, and act as a network between community and systems. The involvement in these activities would lead to them become empowered, which is the output of community development. In the long run, the outcome would be sustainable community development.

NGOS Functions And Sustainable Community Development :

This section highlights NGOs, functions and the promotion of sustainable community development. Specifically, the discussions are on the functions related to provision of microfinance, initiation of community capacity building and selfreliance. Eventually, sustainable community development will be achieved, particularly when community is empowered.

(a) Microfinance and Sustainable Community Development:

During the 1990s, scholars have increasingly referred to microfinance as an effective means of poverty reduction (Rekha 1995; Cerven and Ghazanfar 1999; Pankhurst and Johnston 1999). Oxaal and Baden (1997). Mayoux (2000) and Cheston and Khan (2002) have pointed out the importance of microfinance in empowerment, particularly women empowerment. Microfinance is defined as efforts to improve the access to loans and to saving services for poor people (Shreiner 2001). It is currently being promoted as a key development strategy for promoting poverty eradication and economic empowerment.

It has the potential to effectively address material poverty, the physical deprivation of goods and services and the

income to attain them by granting financial services to households who are not supported by the formal banking sector (Sheraton 2004). Microcredit programs provide small loans and savings opportunities to those who have traditionally been excluded from commercial financial services. As a development inclusion strategy, microfinance programs emphasize women's economic contribution as a way to increase overall financial efficiency within national economies.

(b) Capacity Building and Sustainable Community Development:

As mentioned earlier, capacity building is another NGO's strategy that helps to bring about sustainable community development. Capacity building is an approach to development that builds independence. It can be:

1. A 'means to an end', where the purpose is for others to take on programs.
2. An 'end' in itself, where the intent is to enable others, from individuals through to government departments, to have greater capacity to work together to solve problems
3. A process, where capacity building strategies are routinely incorporated as an important element of effective practice (NSW Health 2001).

Before beginning to build capacity within programs, practitioners need to identify pre-existing capacities such as skills, structures, partnerships and resources.

(c) Self-reliance and Sustainable Community Development:

Self-reliance is another strategy that affects sustainable community



development. Effective community development sits on the foundation of self-reliance. The concept of self-reliance is strategically situated within the essence of community development and is related to other concepts like mutual-help, self-help, participation of the indigenous people and rural progress. Self reliance encourages the necessity for people to use local initiatives, their abilities and their own possessions to improve their condition. Fonchingong and Fonjong (2002) have pointed out that self-reliance is increasingly being adopted as modus operandi for community development.

Conclusion:

This paper demonstrated the importance of NGOs in achieving sustainable community development through micro-finance, capacity building and self-reliance. NGOs through the micro-finance help members of community to access jobs, income-generation and improve economic situation. And then they would become empowered economically. On the other hand, NGOs develop the capacities of community such as skills, abilities, knowledge, assets and motivates the community to participate in the project to improve the quality of their lives. NGOs act as a capacity builders that help the community to achieve the empowerment particularly individual empowerment.

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