THE MOVEMENT FOR COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT

LITERATURE REVIEW: COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

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Purpose

This literature review is part of the Movement for Community-Led Development's (MCLD) ongoing research project. The definitions for and uses of community leadership that emerge from this review may be used by the Collaborative Research Team in order to further their study of essential CLD characteristics identified by the Scoping Group as part of a tool formation process to enable the team to better understand the role, impact and practice of community leadership as per literature.

Methodology

Articles were initially gathered through online keyword searches including "community leaders in development efforts," "measuring effectiveness of community leadership," "local leadership in community-based initiatives," "leadership at the community level," and similar variations. The search engines used were Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Wiley Online Library, JSTOR, and the UC Santa Barbara Library.

An additional subset of the keyword searches took place in the following specific journals, which were identified due to their prominence and relevance: Journal of the Community Development Society, International Journal of Development and Sustainability, Development in Practice, Canadian Journal of Development Studies, Journal of Community Practice and the American Journal of Community Psychology.

Approximately 40% of the articles used in this review were found by way of citation of pieces collected through the search process described above. In the end, about 75-80 papers were read. There were a number of criteria used to narrow down to the 38 included here:

- **Generalizability.** There is limited research conducted on community leadership in a broad sense (Apaliyah et al 2011) and thus much of the work focuses on areas in which community leadership has been prominent. Notable examples include community-led total sanitation, tourism development, and energy projects. A number of works have been excluded for being too specific to fit into a general summary of community leadership.
- **Timeliness.** Due to significant changes in the research of development studies in the past 30 years, and more specifically in the 21st century (Currie-Adle 2016), most articles from before 1990 were excluded, except in cases in which they provided crucial insight or definition that more recent articles lacked.
- **Impact.** A secondary criteria was the number of citations to date on an article. Because this piece is meant to provide a general look at the stance of community leadership literature, it was deemed important to consider the impact of a work on the field; a proxy for impact here, then, was whether an article has been considered important or

well-crafted enough to cite it elsewhere. Most articles with fewer than 5 citations were excluded, unless they provided critical insight that more prominent articles lacked.

Cursory Definitions

The purpose of this article is to give an overview of the literature of community leadership through an exploration of the role of community leaders, factors that hinder and promote community leadership, and the impact of community leadership. We will first discuss commonly accepted definitions of community leadership, community, and leadership.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) distinguishes community, in reference to Gusfield (1975), along two axes: a "territorial and geographical notion" of the term, such as a neighborhood or town, and a "relational" idea of community which concerns itself less with specificity to location and more so to human connection and relationship building. Community in the sense of community leadership in development often takes on both of these dimensions. Community leaders generally act as representatives of a discernable physical area (Munro 2008), and community leadership tends to emphasize the gain of social capital and the importance of existing relationships (Udensi et al 2012).

When considering the meaning of community, it is important to mind the casual connotations of the word; "community" lends itself to an impression of cooperation, compassion and inclusivity. In actuality, the cohesion of a group may be threatened by exclusion due to power differentials in gender, race and class relations, and use of the word "community" may be misleading (Mathie & Cunningham 2003).

Leadership is also widely defined. Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura (2014) understand leadership through the community lens as the "reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals, independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers." In a more general sense, Robinson 1994 specifies leadership to be the "ability to influence, guide or shape the attitudes, expectations and behavior of others to achieve goals." A common thread among all definitions of leadership within the community sphere is the process of involving others in order to achieve or work toward a shared objective.

In the blending of these terms, community leadership tends to describe cases in which a member of a geographical area with specific influence or skill comes forward for a project's benefit, with an emphasis on the relationships between people and tacit knowledge of the community (Martiskainen 2017, Udensi et al 2012, Robinson 1994). Because it is generally taken up by those who are strongly familiar with the area and people, community leadership is a kind of leadership that is deeply rooted in the specific experiences, culture and traditions of a community (Behrens and Benham 2007). "Community leadership" is a fairly new term that has gained traction in the past two decades, most likely beginning with the New Deal for Communities policy adopted in the United Kingdom in 1997 (Purdue 2001, Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura 2014). As mentioned previously, the areas in which this phrase seems to be discussed most widely are community-led total sanitation, tourism development, and small-scale energy projects in the UK (Crocker et al 2016, Kar and Chambers 2008, Aref and Redzuan 2009, Hargreaves et al 2013).

Demographics of Community Leaders

Before we understand what community leaders do, it is important to establish who they are. Community leaders are not usually those who hold traditional positions of leadership or authority elsewhere, and are not necessarily elected, which can lead to increased accountability to the community due to the uncertainty of their position (Behrens and Benham 2007, Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura 2014).

Still, this does not mean that community leaders do not come from relatively more privileged backgrounds. Men are considerably more likely than women to have leadership positions in community projects (Kuponiyi 2017, Wahid et al 2017, Udensi et al 2012, Aref and Redzuan 2009), with results of case studies ranging from 61% male in a group of 150 community leaders in Nigeria to 94.86% male in a group of 175 community leaders in Iran. Despite the gender disparity in community leadership, Ozor and Nwankwo 2009 noted that the contribution of women more generally in community development issues is "very high and significant." Through focus group discussions in the Imo state of Nigeria, Ozor and Nwanko 2009 concluded that the low participation of women in community leadership is due to cultural factors, including disrespect toward women and gender stereotypes. Ajayi and Otuya 2006 also noted that women are often barred from community development planning, leadership and decision-making.

There is also a positive correlation between length of residence in an area and the holding of a community leadership position (Apaliyah et al 2011, Udensi et al 2012, Aref and Redzuan 2009). In a study of 150 community leaders in the Boki local government area of Nigeria by Udensi et al, 79.33% of community leaders had lived in the area for 21 or more years, of which 73% had lived in the area for 30 or more years. The same study found little correlation between age and holding of a community leadership position.

Additionally, community leaders may have had some formal education, which can lend itself to building credibility or to the ability to catalyze the development process (Mathie and Cunningham 2005).

In regard to the motivations of individuals who become community leaders, community leadership is often volunteer based, rather than paid or formally employment (Zanbar and Itzhaky 2013). Still, in countries or communities of mass unemployment and inequality, community leadership may be viewed as a "stepping stone" in the direction of a paid job, and confers a certain level of social status (Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura 2014).

Outside of this situation, motive can be at least partially attributed to altruism, with a high level of association to social motivation as well. For example, a social motivation could include being involved in the community due to seeking the admiration of peers or family members who believe it is important to do so (Bono et al 2010). Altruistic motives may be derived from a feeling of obligation to educate and benefit the community (Simmons et al 2019).

Role of Community Leaders

In keeping with the definition of community leadership, a community leader is an individual who works to mobilize a community toward a goal. Broadly, community leaders play an important role in management and planning. Some of the tasks of community leaders include "decision

making, community mobilization, financial contribution, project legitimization, planning the project, monitoring and evaluating the project, raising funds for the project, and organizing skilled and unskilled labor for the project" (Ozor and Nwankwo 2009, Udensi et al 2012).

Among these, in a survey of 150 Nigerian community leaders, the level of participation of community leaders was found to be the highest in raising funds and closely followed by making decisions. Financial contribution, accepting and approving the project, and community mobilization were then ranked third, fourth and fifth, respectively. Community leaders in this survey had a low level of participation in planning the project, and in monitoring and evaluation (Udensi et al 2012).

Community leaders are sometimes seen as a "mouthpiece" for their community due to their decision-making role, which can lead to a heavy expectation to be the voice for a large group of people, despite the variety of interests and opinions (Munro 2008). This is mitigated by ways in which the community leader aids processes of voicing expectations, learning and networking (Martiskainen 2017). Successful community leaders generally share decision making with representatives and stakeholders in the community (Onyx and Leonard 2011).

Thus, community leaders are also identified in the literature as having a kind of intermediary or broker-like role, as they navigate interactions between their community and external institutions, such as state and local governments (Hargreaves et al 2013, Munro 2008, Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura 2014). Hargreaves et al 2013 in particular calls upon Moss 2009 to describe the role of an intermediary in "facilitating dialogue, providing guidance, bridging gaps, advocating reform, or pioneering novel forms of interaction."

Because of their people-facing role, community leaders can act as unofficial resources to members of the community. Simmons et al (2019), for example, notes that women may often go to unofficial community leaders to report incidences of interpersonal violence; this too uniquely poses the role of a community leader as something of a community expert. Understanding issues such as interpersonal violence requires a strong understanding of social context (Jewkes 2002), which community leaders can poise. Simmons et al (2019) emphasized that, in key informant interviews, community leaders were able to give valuable insight on IPV and to offer tangible and community-specific solutions. This can be described as a bit of a feedback loop: A community leader acquires this role through extensive experience with a community, which they use to gain further knowledge of the community that allows them to serve as a better resource.

Barriers to Success of Community Leadership

Sullivan et al (2007) identify three major challenges to community leadership: engaging the public, providing strategic leadership, and developing collaborative capacity.

In regard to engaging the public, the same study carried out by Udensi et al (2012) which identified the levels of participation of community leaders also identified challenges to community leadership through surveying leaders; lack of interest in the community development project, disagreement between community leaders and members, and non-inclusion of community members were at the top of the list. (The highest ranked item was lack of funds).

Additionally, issues with engaging the public may at least be contributed to by the exclusion of women within community leadership; Hassan and Silong (2008) suggest that women-led community development tends to take a more holistic and "bottoms-up" approach, rather than "top-down," and that this leads to greater success. In an assessment of community-led development organizations in Pakistan, there was very low staff support for projects involving women. Women were also discouraged from submitting projects and, when projects by women were submitted, the release of funds was often delayed or prevented (Wahid et al 2017).

The hurdles that women face, as also discussed in the Demographics of Community Leaders section, in being involved with community leadership and development then may rightfully discourage half of the population and harm public engagement. Additionally, as discussed by Hassan and Silong 2008 and Ajayi and Otuya 2006, women tend to have certain skills and approaches that make them particularly well-suited to successfully engaging with community development. In Ajayi and Otuya 2006, 93.5% of development projects initiated by women were completed and functioning. Thus, one of the greatest barriers to the success of community leadership continues to be pervasive gender inequality.

Another barrier to the success of community leadership is an environment in which it is not encouraged or allowed to flourish. Nel (2018) writes that traditional need-based programs impose upon the community and that the leadership is generally more authoritarian in nature. Such programs also seem to create a dependency upon external agencies, and unintentionally led to a suppression of community participation by placing the emphasis on community deficiciences, needs and problems. In need-based programs, leaders consisted more of formal paid officials, as opposed to the informal and inspired community members that come forward in community-led development; community members also tended to refer to formal leaders, such as doctors and social workers, when asked about local leadership (Nel 2018).

Key Factors in the Success of Community Leaders

In an examination of case studies spanning Australia, Sweden, and South America, Onyx and Leonard 2011 found seven elements consistent across community leaders in successful development, which are also cited in Martiskainen 2017.

1) The community leaders are "embedded" in the community and within the community's social networks. They do not come into the role from a position of formal authority. 2) The community leader is able to articulate both goals for the community and a way forward to achieve them.
2) The community leader is energetic, committed and persistent, especially in cases where others are pessimistic.
3) The community leader shares all key decision making, including discussion, debate and negotiation. Decisions are generally based on consensus, not just a majority vote, of all relevant stakeholders.
4) The community leader has the skills and knowledge to manage the project and to delegate,

with a particular importance placed on the maintenance of administrative systems.

5) The community leader creates connections to external sources of resources and skills. These links are used to support the community and to "fill the gaps within the community."

6) The community leader has a succession plan and after their term of leadership is complete, the project will continue to be sustainable.

These sentiments are echoed across the literature. In Ghana, the organization Plan UK identified "natural leaders" in community-led total sanitation by noting which individuals had built a latrine, attended community meetings, and expressed the project's importance to others (Crocker et al 2016). These individuals, who were motivated by group outcomes and had influence in the community, were given training in participatory, social, and technical skills, which led to substantial reductions in open defecation as compared to the control group. In this case, the leaders met at least criteria #1 and #3, and supplementing #5 with leadership training showed promising results (Crocker 2016).

Levels of initial social capital in a community are also correlated to the success of community leadership. Social capital describes the idea that interpersonal relationships and social norms are important for sustainability, with four specific features of social capital being "relations of trust; reciprocity and exchanges; common rules, norms, and sanctions; and connectedness in networks and groups." Social capital then lowers the transactional cost of cooperation, and increases both confidence and motivation to take part in collective actions (Pretty 2003). Community leadership is most effective and deeply rooted in communities with high social capital, and can fail or have adverse effects in areas with low social capital (Crocker et al 2016).

Participation of community leaders in the actual development projects is important to success, as it builds upon social capital and encourages community participation (Kuponiyi 2008). A fair subset of the literature also emphasizes the importance of asset-based community-led development as a propellant for community leadership (Nel 2018, Nel 2015, Mathie and Cunningham 2005, van de Venter and Redwood 2016, Haines 2009). Asset-based community development focusing on developing a community's assets and emphasizing the inherent strengths and capacity of a community, rather than placing a narrow scope on the community's problems (Mathie and Cunningham 2005, Haines 2009).

An emphasis on community wisdom and resilience, rather than community hopelessness, encourages community members to use their expert knowledge of the area and assume ownership of their future, resulting in greater signs of self-reliance (Nel 2018). According to Nel 2018, in a study of 24 community projects in South Africa, leadership and participation driven by community members was more evident in communities that were sensitized to asset-based community development.

Measurement and Evaluation of Community Leadership

There is not a comprehensive and widely used tool for the measurement of community leadership; instead, what we will offer here are metrics for leadership and social capital that can

be applied to community leadership. The characteristics of a strong community leader as described by Onyx and Leonard 2011, discussing earlier in this review, could also serve as a benchmark.

Due to the significant role of social capital in encouraging community leadership, measuring social capital could potentially be used as a proxy for community leadership. Easterling 2011 discusses the National Social Capital Learning Circle, which assessed community leadership activity. In a survey of 12 foundations, social capital programming was analyzed across seven categories: "publicizing issues that need more public and political attention; drawing together various stakeholders to develop new solutions; creating a new organization focused on a critical local issue; developing, testing, and disseminating innovative program models; advocating for changes in public policy and social norms; encouraging people and organizations to adopt new practices; and building the capacity of individuals, organizations, and communities."

The parallels here between our discussion of community leadership and this rubric for social capital are clear. Successful community leadership focuses on addressing local issues through the participation of stakeholders and the encouragement of people to adopt new practices; additionally, as noted, social norms around gender hinder community leadership and advocating for changes in these arenas benefit the community. While these points can be detailed further to become more specific to community-led development, it may be a useful starting point for measuring efficacy of community leadership.

Igalla et al (2019) suggests a more specific measurement that could be applied to community leadership by creating a tool that analyzes performance of community-based initiatives, and includes the analysis of leadership in these scenarios. The performance of community-based initiatives here are understood as "the multi-categorical achievement of community and organizational outcomes resulting from self-organizing one or more specific public services and/or goods." Leadership of citizens and "long-term visioning as community leadership" are considered key factors (Igalla et al 2019).

Perceived performance is used as a stand-in for objective performance, as community participants were asked to evaluate the performance of community leaders in two sections, as below. (Labelling of the sections as A and B have been added by the writer of this review for clarity.)

Section A. The management (board or leading persons) of the initiative
... 1) has a clear idea (vision) of where the organization is heading
2) is a source of inspiration for the members/volunteers within its organization 3) makes plans that display visible leadership to its members/volunteers and followers 4) develops long-term plans for the organization
5) challenges me to solve existing problems in new ways

Section B. The management (board or leading persons) of the initiative ... 1) involves people from outside the organization when making decisions 2) works closely with others (outside the organization) to achieve results 3) aims to link external developments (new opportunities, possibilities, etc.) to the citizen initiative
4) devotes a lot of time to maintaining contact with parties outside the organization
5) has a sense of what is important for parties outside the initiative

We can again note overlap between the rubric points here and previously established factors for successful community leadership, such as having clear goals for the organization, serving as a joyful and persistent leader, creating long-term goals, bridging connections between the community and external agencies, and sharing in decision making. These constructs might be useful as a starting point for a more comprehensive tool for evaluating community leadership.

Results/Impact of Community Leadership

The literature strongly agrees that the presence of community leaders is crucial to community development (Gutiérrez 2011, Leisher et al 2012, Simmons et al 2019, Onyx and Leonard 2011, Kar and Chambers 2008, Crocker et al 2016, Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura 2014, Behrens and Benham 2007, Bono 2012, Udensi et al 2012, Aref and Redzuan 2009, Munro 2008, Hargreaves et al 2013, Ozor and Nwanko 2009, Apaliyah et al 2012, Nel 2018, Mathie and Cunningham 2003, Igalla 2019, Taylor 2007, Hassan and Silong 2008, Kuponiyi 2008 — i.e. every article that discusses community leadership).

The strong impact of community leadership is seen both quantitatively and qualitatively. By equipping community leaders with better tools and leadership training in a community-led total sanitation intervention in Ghana, for instance, open defecation was reduced by 19.9% (Crocker et al 2016). Legitimate community leaders help create community resilience to change, which contributes to sustainability, enhance conflict resolution, and encourage the participation of other community members (Gutiérrez 2011). Gutiérrez also advocates for the allocation of resources toward identifying community leaders and developing social capital in order to promote success in community programs.

Community leadership has a strong, positive and direct relationship with the measured performance of community-based initiatives (Igalla et al 2019) and surveys of local people also note that lack of capable community leadership is a large barrier to community development (Aref and Redzuan 2009). Without motivated local leaders of the community, it is difficult for initiatives

to take off.

Additionally, community leadership has a strong, positive and direct relationship with the measured performance of community-based initiatives (Igalla 2019).

Communities, and community leaders by extension, have the best knowledge of local conditions and thus the greatest ability to enact real change (Ozor and Nwankwo 2009). Community leaders are resources to the community and become experts in community issues due to their strong existing relationships with the people, which uniquely poises them to understand and act on community projects (Simmons et al 2019).

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