

**APPLICABILITY OF SELECTED  
CONSULTATION CONCEPTS TO  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

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Based upon his experience, particularly overseas, Mr. Senior has attempted to examine the applicability of selected consultation concepts to community development.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

In discussing community development one is struck by its newness and vastness—vastness of need and vastness of scope.

More than half of the world's population live in the under-developed countries.<sup>1</sup> Eighty percent of this number are to be found in the three to five million villages and rural districts of such countries.<sup>2</sup> India alone has an estimated 550,000 villages in which exist 85% of its 400 million people.<sup>3</sup> Most of these rural inhabitants live under conditions of poverty, disease, misery and illiteracy that are hardly imaginable to those who have not witnessed them first-hand. Much of life in these underdeveloped and newly-developing nations is far more wretched than in the industrially more advanced and economically more privileged societies. Compounding their plight is that those most in need are least able to do anything about it.

Yet in spite of the overwhelming needs, community development (CD) as it is now

carried on is considered relatively new in the field of community organization social work. While it is true that the British Colonial Office and some American, British and French voluntary (mainly religious-oriented) agencies have been conducting similar or the same activities on a limited scale for several decades, it only has been since the end of World War II that this field has blossomed, has become comprehensive in content<sup>4</sup> and national and international in scope. The circumstances of many countries becoming independent and others reacting to the impact of industrialization and exposure to the outside world has markedly stimulated its growth.

As Harper and Dunham observed a few years back:

The emergence of 'Community Development' in respect to newly-developing or so-called technically less developed areas has been the most exciting trend in international social welfare, directly related to community organization, within the last decade.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Community Development" in *Social Work Year Book—1960*, edited by Russell Kurtz, p. 180. (15).

<sup>2</sup>William J. Cousins, "Community Development in West Bengal" in *Community Development Review*, September, 1959, p. 40. (9).

<sup>3</sup>Russell Kurtz, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup>Irwin T. Sanders, editor, *Community Development and National Change*, p. 3. (18).

<sup>5</sup>Ernest B. Harper and Arthur Dunham, *Community Organization in Action*, p. 501. (11).

Perhaps it is because of its recent and very rapid growth that one is able to find so little about consultation in community development, or the applicability of consultation concepts to the field. Whatever the reason may be, however, it is disappointing to find in a review of the literature little on consultation in rural settings<sup>6</sup> and almost nothing on consultation in CD. It is not a case of consultation not being practised or needed in community development. Quite the contrary. From his studies, his experiences<sup>7</sup> with, and observations<sup>8</sup> of consultation in community development, the author is aware of its widespread use. The very nature of this field and its practitioners demand such widespread use.

The CD worker must deal with a variety of problems, and be knowledgeable and skilled in many areas: health and sanitation, education, housing, and agriculture, to name a few. He is not a specialist, but must depend on specialists for advice, education, process analysis, stimulation and help in interpretation.<sup>9</sup> As Louis Miniclier has emphasized, community development requires the use of the knowledge and skills of the specialists—several specialist fields must in fact be integrated in its practice.<sup>10</sup>

Without belaboring the need for or utilization of consultation in CD, this paper attempts to discuss applicability of consultation concepts in this field. Three concepts

have been selected for consideration: (1) *the maneuvering of the consultant into a supervisory role*; (2) *direct involvement of the consultant in the consultee's program*; and (3) *determining the duration and termination of consultation*.

These concepts will be discussed against the backdrop of some of the more important problems, characteristics and aspects of the professional practice of community development. To what extent are these ideas valid in the CD milieu? Must they be modified, and if so, in what way? What are the particular forces, goals, and conflicts in CD which would influence modification or make possible or doubtful their applicability? Before turning to a discussion of these questions and the specific concepts, however, and hopefully to shed some illumination on the meshing of consultation in community development, some definitions and general comments are in order.

## II. DEFINITIONS AND GENERAL COMMENTS

A. *Consultation*. Consultation has been defined as a "helping process which involves the use of technical knowledge and professional relationships with one or more persons. Its purpose is to help consultees carry out their professional responsibilities more effectively."<sup>11</sup>

B. *Community Development*. Community development is a method and a process which involves (1) participation of villagers

<sup>6</sup>CD settings for the most part are rural rather than urban, with the economy built on agriculture rather than industry. This paper takes cognizance of CD going on in urban slum areas, but as it represents but a small proportion of the activity in the field, it is not considered here. The application of consultation concepts to urban community development in underdeveloped lands would be different from those in the more common rural settings.

<sup>7</sup>American Joint Distribution Committee—Iran.

<sup>8</sup>Iranian Red Lion and Sun (Red Cross), United States A.I.D. (Point IV), and U.N.I.C.E.F. programs, and American Joint Distribution Committee in Europe and Israel.

<sup>9</sup>Some of the responsibilities of consultants as seen by Edward O. Moe, "Consulting with a Community System: A Case Study" in *The Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. XV, 1959, pp. 28-35. (17).

<sup>10</sup>Louis Miniclier, "Introduction" in *Community Development Review*, March, 1957, p. 1. (5).

<sup>11</sup>Virginia Insley, "Social Work Consultation in Public Health" in *Concepts of Mental Health in Consultation* edited by Gerald Caplan. Pp. 215-216 (11).

in determining particular goals and in planning and working toward their achievement, and (2) a change or development agent sent in by a sponsor agency from outside the village; together these two (villagers and development agent) direct their efforts toward the satisfaction of felt economic, social political and/or cultural needs of the villagers. These may be part of or related to needs and objectives of the nation as determined by the sponsor agency.

C. *Participants.* There are three general classes of participants in community development: the sponsor organization, the professional worker (or change or development agent) and the inhabitants of the village.

The *sponsor organization* is either the government (or one of its political subdivisions); a foreign government (as the United States A.I.D. program); the home country government of an occupying or colonial power (as the United Kingdom's program in Kenya); an intergovernmental body (as the United Nations); or a foreign voluntary agency (as the American Friends Service Committee).

Sponsorship involves a complex of commitments and actions by the sponsor organization, the most important of which are the establishment of long-range goals, setting basic policy, financing (at least in part) and recruiting, training and sending in the development agent to the village.

The *development agent* in this discussion is the consultee. He is invariably a native<sup>12</sup> if the sponsor is the government; sponsor organizations originating outside of the country use both native and foreign-born

workers. He is assumed to have had training for his responsibilities, and as pointed out earlier, is expected to be multi-skilled. His depth of skill, however, is shallow in most if not all of the fields and disciplines.

The *villagers* are the third in the trio of participants. In most emerging countries they represent a majority in numbers though they are not dominant in power.<sup>13</sup> In the relationship with the other two participants, it is

interesting to note that the initiative of service comes from outside—the sponsor organization sends in the change agent to the villages. "Few community development projects," as Stensland has noted, "start with spontaneous combustion. Some outside forces have been there to suggest an idea, spark enthusiasm, provide guidance, even give direct assistance."<sup>14</sup> This is a significant difference from other sub-fields of community work practice where local citizens initiate steps, solve their problems and themselves recruit the agent, and different also from most other fields of social work practice where initiative for obtaining help resides in the client.

Where does the *consultant fit*? The usual pattern is that the consultant is an employee of the sponsor organization in a "staff" (as contrasted to a "line") position in the administrative hierarchy. Because the emerging countries are woefully short of trained personnel, the consultant is likely to be a foreigner; this is invariably true with foreign sponsorship and not uncommon under a government sponsorship. Although he is interested in individual adjustment, the consultant is more concerned with environmental manipulation and activities of large numbers

<sup>12</sup>But he probably is not rural-born. As has been pointed out by Isobel Kelly, native-born technicians and development workers are urban-bred and educated, often are unfamiliar with the culture of the rural residents, and may require an orientation to the cultural diversification of their own country. "Technical Cooperation and the Culture of the Host Country" in *Community Development Review*, September 1959, p. 3. (10).

<sup>13</sup>Lucien W. Pye, "Community Development as Part of Political Development," in *Community Development Review*, March, 1958, p. 2. (7).

<sup>14</sup>Per G. Stensland, "Urban Community Development," *ibid.*, p. 33 (8).

of people. He is more likely to be involved in program than case consultation.

### III. DISCUSSION

#### *Being maneuvered into a supervisory role.*

One of the unique aspects of community development practice is the isolation of the CD worker-consultee. His isolation is social, cultural and professional as well as geographical. Regardless of the distance from the metropolitan center, he is physically far away in travel time because of poorly-developed or non-existent transportation facilities and the difficulty of travel.

He is better educated and culturally (artistically) more sophisticated than those whom he works amongst, and he is not apt to find many in the rural district who share his personal and social interests. There are no colleagues alongside with whom he can share his experiences and problems. Contacts with his supervisor and administrator are infrequent, and he must work for long periods of time on his own.<sup>15</sup>

It is not unexpected, therefore, that the worker should look forward with more enthusiasm to a visit from a consultant than his counterpart consultee in the more developed Western lands. The latter is seen not just in the role of a consultant, he is someone to talk to and socialize with, someone to complain to and for the purposes of our discussion, he is someone to relate to as a supervisor.

Virginia Insley has repeatedly cautioned the consultant from becoming involved in supervision. She emphasizes that the "supervisory responsibility is incompatible with the maintenance of a consultative relationship,"<sup>16</sup>

that special steps must be taken to avoid the supervisor's role when rendering consultation to social workers who lack supervision,<sup>17</sup> and again, "In program consultation as in case consultation the consultant must avoid being drawn into a supervisory role by his own needs or those of the consultee".<sup>18</sup>

Yet under the circumstances noted above, the consultant in a CD setting should *expect* a consultee to turn to him for direction as well as advice, for the handling of a whole range of problems—supervisory, administrative and personal, as well as programmatic. Insley indicates that if problems arise by such a shift of role in the consultative relationship, they are the result of the consultant assuming or allowing himself to be maneuvered into a supervisory role.<sup>19</sup>

The view in this paper is that the nature of community development practice makes almost inevitable the blurring of the role of the consultant; that he should anticipate this; that he should permit his being maneuvered into a supervisory or other role provided it is limited and assuming that this shift and its implications have been previously discussed with the administration; and that he should be aware of the role alteration that is taking place.

#### *Direct involvement of the consultant in the consultee's program.*

Direct involvement is another shift in the consultant's role, but one that is more clear-cut. It is collaborative with the consultee and focuses on the development program, or a particular phase of it. It is quite common in CD because of the special characteristics of this field; significant among these, and major

<sup>15</sup>"American Friends Service Committee, Selected Findings and Queries," *Community Development Review*, March, 1957. p. 34 (4).

<sup>16</sup>Virginia Insley, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>18</sup>Virginia Insley, "Program Consultation" in *Concepts of Mental Health in Consultation* edited by Gerald Caplan, p. 239. (13).

<sup>19</sup>Virginia Insley, "Social Work Consultation in Public Health," *op. cit.*, p. 216.

reasons for direct involvement, are the apathy-need dilemma of the villagers, the essentiality of initiative coming from outside the village as has been noted, and the emphasis on goal achievement.

A dilemma in CD is that the individuals and communities most in need of developmental undertakings are the ones most wanting in sufficient internal and external resources to take steps to alleviate their condition. Shackled by apathy, poverty, and illiteracy, lacking the skills to undertake improvements, and with initiative dormant, they engage in a development project only after they have been motivated by an outside agent, after the village power structure has sanctioned it, and after they have been shown how. The level of skill and knowledge of many of the change agents precludes his doing all of his alone. A worker may be able to stimulate the people to participate in an immunization program, and to gain the acquiescence of the village elders, but he will need the assistance of the consultant in explaining the details and consequences. In this type of involvement by the consultant, it appears that the villagers along with the worker become part of the consultee system.

A further cause for direct involvement is the importance of and the emphasis upon goal achievement. While *process* is vital in CD, it heavily underscores *problem-solving*, accomplishing the objectives. Solving a particular problem may be a decisive factor in whether CD can continue to operate. The consultee, consequently, needs all the resource help he can muster. If a consultant is on the scene or can be called in, it is not unlikely that an attempt will be made to involve him directly where this involvement will make possible or contribute to the attainment of an objective.

Furthermore, solving a problem or reaching a particular goal assumes greater proportions as the resolution of other problems or the attainment of other goals await upon the first. Community development is complicated by the fact that so many facets of village life and problems of development are inextricably related one to another.

The experience of the Indian "Grow More Food Campaign" illustrates this interrelatedness.<sup>20</sup> Increasing agricultural production would help solve core problems of hunger for the country and poverty of the farmers. This depended not only on education and involvement of the farmers, but on the introduction of fertilizer and seeds. Money was needed to buy fertilizer, so a plan of rural credit was needed. Seeds did not do well because of an inadequate water supply. Fields could not be harvested as malaria was endemic. Whatever increased output resulted could not be maximized because of poor roads to market. And so it went.

With so much depending on the resolution of a particular problem, it is not unexpected that the consultee will overtly or covertly attempt to draw in the consultant and get him to participate directly in the program.

It has been suggested by Insley that assisting the consultee in carrying out a recommendation or program objective is a legitimate consultative responsibility.<sup>21</sup> In case consultation Caplan has cautioned against the consultant's involvement and his becoming too concerned with the results. For community development these views would be emphasized or amended to the point of asserting that the consultant *frequently* becomes directly involved with the client system (villagers) on program and has an attachment to the results, that is, works with the consultee toward goal achievement.

<sup>20</sup>Grace E. Langley, "Community Development Programme—Republic of India" in *Community Development Review*, September, 1957, pp. 11-12 (6).

<sup>21</sup>Virginia Insley, "Program Consultation", *op. cit.*, p. 235.

*Determining the Duration and Termination of Contact*

Determining the duration and termination of contact with the consultee is a concept that must be tempered by the characteristics of isolation referred to above. The duration of a consultant's visit is determined less by his interaction with the consultee, and more by the realities of a bus schedule, or in how many days the next plane is due to leave a neighbouring town.

Caplan discusses timing of the termination in terms of a resolution of the problem, delaying intervention until the moment of crisis and arranging a second visit "to play for time".<sup>22</sup> Insley advises the consultant not to press for facts and feelings, to take his time, to wait until the consultee is ready to talk.<sup>23</sup> The gist of these principles seems to be that duration, intervention, timing and termination are determined by the consultation process. In CD, however, one can assert only that these are *influenced to some extent* by the process, and the use the consultant makes of it. Often they are *more influenced* by the characteristics of underdeveloped countries—inadequate travel facilities, distances between villages and the paucity of consultation personnel which requires still further limitation on the amount of time they can allocate to any one place.

A consultant will have a set period of time, usually a few days or a week in a village—and the consultee is aware of this. Whatever help he is going to give must be rendered then. Coming back soon for a second visit is too rigorous, even assuming that the administration would permit the concentration of so scarce a resource in one location.

This is not to suggest that the consultant is finished with the village after one visit. He can return, but in all likelihood it will

not be soon. He cannot risk "delaying intervention until the moment of crisis". He won't be around at the time of crisis and by his next visit it would long since have been dealt with one way or another, and anxiety arising from it drained off in one form or another.

On a tour of villages with a public health nursing consultant long experienced in development programs in emerging lands, the author marvelled at her capacity to "trigger" or induce readiness when the consultee was reticent. A consultant in this type of setting cannot afford not to press for facts and the expression of feelings. Time is limited. If the next bus is tomorrow and not another for a week the consultant cannot wait.

In short, the consultant in community development must be sensitive to the extent which the special circumstances and characteristics of underdevelopment will determine duration, point of intervention and termination.

#### IV. SUMMARY

The field of community development in community organization social work is relatively new; it is vast in scope in terms of the numbers of peoples it is or should be concerned with; and there is a parallel vastness in the human, communal and societal needs which it seeks to meet.

Consultation is a helping process extensively used and essential in the practice of CD. Because of the unique aspects of the latter and the special characteristics and problems of emerging nations, however, many of the concepts of consultation as developed in the Westernized practice of social work and public health must be modified or jettisoned in their application to CD.

<sup>22</sup>Gerald Caplan, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-27.

<sup>23</sup>Virginia Insley, *op. cit.*, "Social Work Consultation in Public Health", p. 226.

In this paper three consultation concepts have been briefly examined. All three are applicable to community development but must be modified in their application. While the consultant in more orthodox settings should avoid being maneuvered into a supervisory role, he should expect to be maneuvered in many CD settings and should permit it under certain circumstances. The nature of CD makes almost inevitable the blurring of the consultant's role; he should anticipate this, be sensitive to it, and discuss it with the administration beforehand.

Direct involvement in the consultee's program is not usual in Western social work practice, but in the CD activity of underdeveloped societies the consultant should recognize its prevalence. While process is vital in CD, goal-achievement often takes a higher priority; in striving toward it the consultee and his client system, the villagers, will expect and induce the direct involvement of the consultant in seeking the maximization of their objectives.

Determining the duration and termination of contact depends less on the consultant's use of the consultation process than would be true in the Western world.

It remains an essential factor, but the characteristics of underdeveloped countries, including isolation of the village and backward transportation facilities and roads also strongly influence the duration and termination of contact.

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It is recognized that this exploration of the applicability of consultation concepts to community development does not exhaust, it barely scratches, the list of consultation concepts which may have to be modified in this type of practice. Among them are the conscious use of crisis and anxiety in cultures where they are not easily evoked or often expressed; the acceptance of the government or foreign consultant where outsiders are looked upon with suspicion, and where their role expectation by the villager and often of the native-born CD practitioner is that of an exploiter, not a helper; and the effect of the cultural factor of predeterminism upon the function of consultation, a function which requires the exercise of free will.

The exploration of these and other concepts deserve further exploration in other and future papers, as do the ideas examined in this one.