THE EFFECTIVE MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Mohammad Shatar Sabran
Department of Social Science and Development, Faculty of Human Ecology
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor

Abstract: In Malaysia there are several efforts and programs that has been implemented to develop rural communities both socially and economically. Millions of dollars and effort have been spent for that purpose. One of the popular approaches that has been used by both the government and the private agencies to achieve the goal is through community development projects. Community development stressed on the involvement of all parties in the projects. This would include the government, community developers, and the people in the communities. Community development is the purposeful effort by community people to learn and work together to guide the future development of their communities, making full use of their resources as well as the external resources Community development is also a process through which people and communities learn how they can help themselves. Despite having a tremendous effort and financial support from the government and the agencies involved in the programs, many of the community development projects that have been implemented were not sustainable. Most of the community development projects remained "dead" or disappeared few years after the implementation date. The projects worked great just for the first few years of the implementation. What went wrong? Why the community development projects introduced did not last longer or sustain? Perhaps the model that is going to be discussed in this article would be able to help explaining what and why most of the community development projects that have been implemented failed or did not sustain. Furthermore this model is going to illustrate step by step process of how to sustain community development projects. It is hope that the model will be used as a guideline for the government and all other interested agencies to help develop communities in this country. If this occurs, the government of Malaysia and the agencies involved will no longer waste money and efforts on community development projects that do not produce adequate returns on the investment. This will benefit the people in the communities, as the government and the agencies involved will have more money to spend on other needs such as education, infrastructures and other social development.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the discussion of the effective model for sustainable community development, it is important to understand the basic concept and definition of community development and sustainable community development itself. Without having clearer understanding of community development, readers may have difficulty understanding the idea brought by the model of sustainable community development project.

Community Development

Community development is a process available to people of whatever political persuasion, working, and for whatever causes. It can be used alike by people of liberal, conservative or radical ideology. Indeed, community development is even more than a process; it is a movement, a philosophy, a value system, an orientation.

Many people hold the conviction that those at the most fundamental level of social life, the community, are best able to judge what they want and need and that they ought to be considered and included in making the relevant decisions about their lives and properties (Ravitz, 1982:2) [[14]. Adding to this definition, Hayes (1981:221) viewed community development as a process of dynamic change, involving conflict and concerned primarily with changing power relationships.

Community Development Academy (1997) [4] in its definition of community development stressed on the involvement of all parties in the projects. This would include the government, community developers, and the people in the communities. According to this view, community development is the

purposeful effort by community people to learn and work together to guide the future development of their communities making full use of their own resources as well as external resources.

Community Development Academy (CDA) has also added that community development is a process through which people and communities learn how they can help themselves. CDA also illustrated that community development includes a set of steps to establish a program of work and moves toward goals.

A more comprehensive and latest definition of community developments given by Shaffer (1995: 148) [17]. According to him community development is:

.....those communities that manage and control their destiny based on a realistic and well thought vision. Such a community based on management and control approach requires that a process be instituted within the community that effectively uses knowledge and knowledge systems to direct change and determine appropriate courses of action consistent with ecological principles. The process must be comprehensive and address social, economic, physical, and environment concerns in an integrated fashion while maintaining central concern for present and future welfare of individual and the community.

The Purpose Of Community Development

The main purpose of community development is to improve the quality of life of the people in the community. Community development also helps people to improve their social and economic situation. It helps to provide a better framework for the people in the community to work together with a sense of shared mission, clearer roles and responsibilities, and a holistic understanding of community development (Community Development Agenda, 1998). Community development is also helping to develop the capacity on the part of local people to take control of their lives, to bring about equity, and to anticipate future problems (Hayes, 1981).

A more comprehensive purpose of community development is explained by Christenson, Fendley, and Robinson, Jr. (1989) [7]. According to them, the primary purpose of community development is to help people improve their social and economic situation. The underlying philosophy is to help people become subjects instead of objects, acting on their situation instead of simply reacting to it. Community development focuses on the humanistic elements involved in change and how such change contributes to social and economic well-being.

In Malaysia the general purpose of community development is to eradicate the problem of poverty among the people in rural communities in the country. The more specific objective of community development in the country is to increase the income level of the people above the poverty line.

Why Community Development Is Important?

Community development is important because it provide the systematic framework for all development efforts. It is also necessary for a long-term success in today's world. There are several elements involved in community development. The examples of such elements are education, economic development, housing development, health care, leadership, agriculture, and infrastructure development (CDA, 1997) [4]. All of these elements are interconnected to each other.

Sustainable Community Development

What is sustainable community development? In general, there is no universal acceptable definition of sustainable community development. This is because for each site of community development it has its own characteristics that result in unique opportunities and constraints. However, one of the most common definitions of sustainable community development is a development that meets the needs of the present demand of the people in the community without compromising the ability of the future generation of the people in the community to meet their own needs (Modification from the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

Most definitions of sustainable community are based on intergenerational equity, which is captured by the idea that "... the current generation must not compromise the ability of the future generations to

meet their material needs and enjoy a healthy environment' (Batie, 1989) [1]. Using the similar concept and idea, sustainable community development agrees that the use of resources in the present should not results in a decreasing standard of living for the future generation in the community.

Gibbs (1994) [8], however, has inserted a new idea to the definition of sustainable community development. According to Gibbs, one of the important elements in sustainable community development is it is a local based. This is because, sustainable community development favors increased local control over development decisions, as such "bottom up' development strategies would require development of decision making authority to the local level.

The idea given by Gibbs has been weakening today as people and communities are oriented to happening beyond the local community and less involved in local affairs. This trend has been exacerbated by technological advances in communications and transportation that allow people to maintain diverse relationships and no longer based on residential proximity (Meyrowitz, 1986) [10].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Effective Model For Sustainable Community Development

The effective Model for Sustainable Community Development (MSCD) has three main levels. There are community leaders, community development process and the results of sustainable community development. Each level has it own role to play and its performance would affect the performance in the other level. This is because each level is interconnected to one another. The detail of the model is shown in Figure 1 below.

a. Community Leader

Who is a community leader?   In general, a community leader is an individual in the community who has the ability to influence and persuade other individual or group to accomplish goals in a given situation in the community. The main role of a community leader is to help the people in the community to achieve their potential as individuals and as team members (Robinson, Jr. 1994).

To enable them to carry out such responsibilities effectively, the community leaders must be occupied themselves with effective leadership characteristics. Among the most popular effective leadership characteristics in the literature today were discussed by Stodgill(1981) [18], Campbell (1999) [2], Nanus (1992) [12], Sabran (1999) [16] and Community Development Academy (2000) [5].

However, having the effective leadership characteristic alone is not enough to ensure community leaders to sustain any development projects in the community. They need to have a strong and good social and political networking both with the internal and external resources.   The relationship between community leaders and such resources is very important because the people in the community could get social, political and financial support from the networking. Such support is very important because it does not only help the people in the community to initiate the project but it also helps the people to maintain and sustain the projects. There are several community development projects that have gone through this process. All of the projects have shown a tremendous success. To name a few are Community Based Human Development Project (PMAK), Mini Estate Farming, and *In-Situ* Community Development.
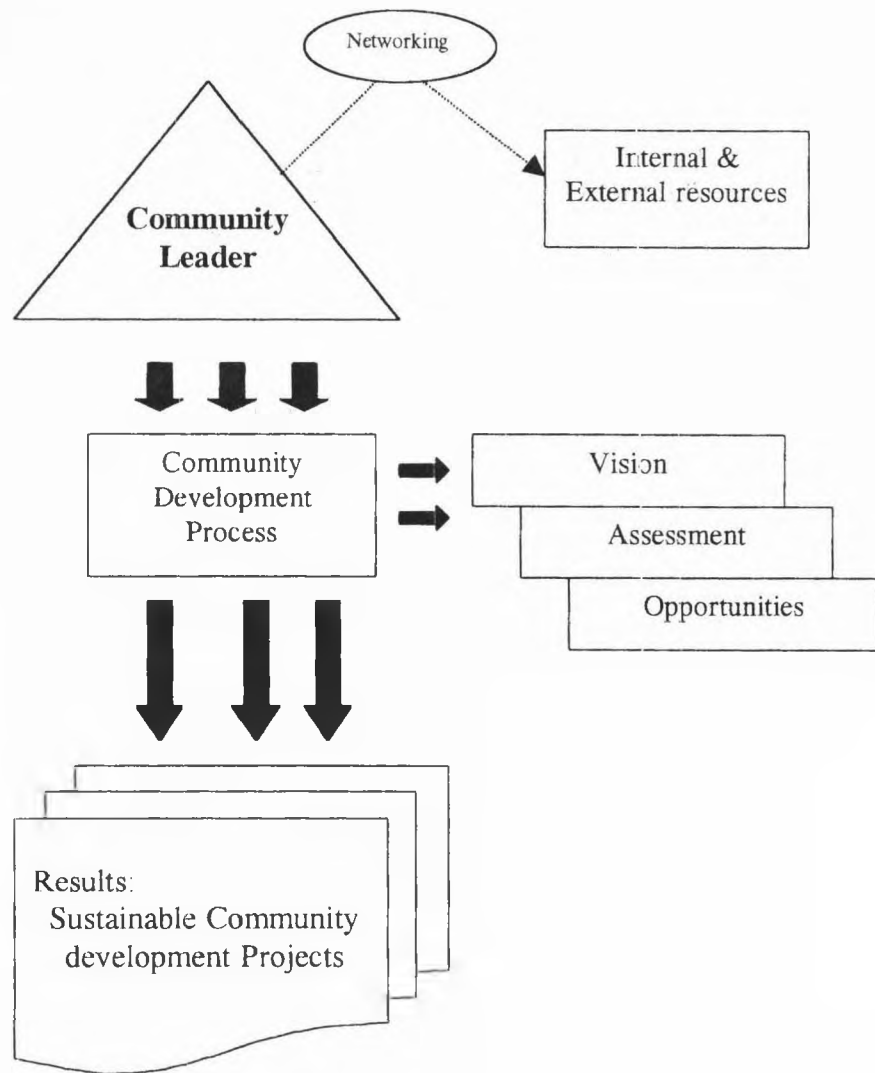
Figure 1: The Effective Model For Sustainable Community Development
Source: Shatar, 1999 & 2003 [11] [16]

b. Community Development Process

After gone through the first phase or level in the model of sustainable community development successfully, any community development projects need to pass through the second level of the model. This is the most complicated and time consuming level in the model. There are three main elements in this level. There are the community vision, project assessment and opportunities. Each element needs to be discussed thoroughly by the people in the community involved.

i.   Community vision - In his e-book Sustainable Economy and Community Development, Cybelle Imitt (2004) [6] stated that a community vision is very important to the success of any project implemented in a community. A community vision is a mental journey of where the people in the community want to be ten or more years into the future. To accomplish a reliable and practical community vision, the people in the community have to discuss and reach to a consensus together. The involvement of the people in the community is very significant at this stage.

ii. Economic assessment -   Conducting an economic assessment of the community will help the people in the community to determine their ability to stimulate economic activity. Some of the factors they will want to look into are: Access to capital, the health of business environment, the condition and level of infrastructures, the availability and caliber of human and natural capital, and the quality of life the community has to offer (Kinsley, 1997) [9].

iii. Opportunities - Once the people in the community have a clearer vision of what they want to strive for and a more holistic understanding of what they have to work with, they may be able to discover new opportunities which otherwise may have gone unrecognized. At this point, the people in the community are better equipped to generate idea for economic projects, evaluate them and select the ones that most compatible with long-term vision and the available resources

To accomplish those three elements - vision, assessment and opportunities- successfully, the communities involved must employ techniques and strategies highlighted in community development process. According to the Okafor (1982) [13] and Sabran (1999) [16] there are at least five different steps in the community development process.

i. Building a general awareness for the community: The   purpose of this stage is to convince the people in the communities that in addition to the government and its function in providing some of the needs of the communities, the communities themselves can initiate their own development programs. Since the priorities of the community development may differ from those of the government or any other external change agencies, the people should be made aware of such divergences in priorities and the need to develop their own communities with their own efforts.

ii. Systematic analysis of the community problems: Obviously, not all the community problems will be handled at the same time by the same method. Efforts should be made to identify priority problems and relate them to the resources available for tackling them.

iii. Training the project leaders : The purpose of this process is to ensure that, the selected leaders would be able to execute the projects. Successful execution of most of the community development projects in most of the communities depends on the organizers and the leaders. In this process of the project execution, project leaders should be democratically elected. Many projects have failed simply because project leaders have been thrust upon the community. Such leaders are denied cooperation, which is vital to the success of the community development projects. Community development projects usually succeed where they are based on the broadest sense of participatory democracy.

iv. People involvement: The main purpose of this stage is to make the people in the community involved realized that their involvement is significant to the success of the projects. It is also to help them see the need for the consistent support of the projects.

v. Building solidarity and network support groups: Through open public meeting, workshops, etc., leaders of the community development projects should seek ways and means of building support for the projects being handled. Support from the government should also be sought and if necessary lobbied for.

Another similar process in a community development project is illustrated by Cawley (1989) [3]. According to Cawley, the process of community development can be divided into six different phases: (1) awareness of the process; (2) identifying needs; (3) setting goals; (4) planning actions; (5) taking action; and (6) completion and consolidation. Unlike Okafor, Cawley emphasized that the process of community development comes in a circle format. In each process or phase, it has its own loop in which the process will remain circling until the goal for that particular process is achieved. The illustration of the process is shown in Figure 2.

As mentioned earlier, community development process is very complicated and a very time consuming stage. It requires a lot of patient and time, commitment and support from the people in the community involved. Due to such reasons, a lot of the people in communities are reluctant to follow the detail and tedious process as recommended by community development process. The

implication faced by such communities for not following the process recommended is the failure or unsustainable community development projects.

Few of the examples are duck raising project in Bagan Datoh , Pasar Malam Stalls in Alor Gajah, and One Village One Product Project. There are many other similar community development projects which faced difficulties because of their reluctant ness to spend time, energy and effort as what are recommended in the community development process in their community projects (Sabran, 1999) [16].
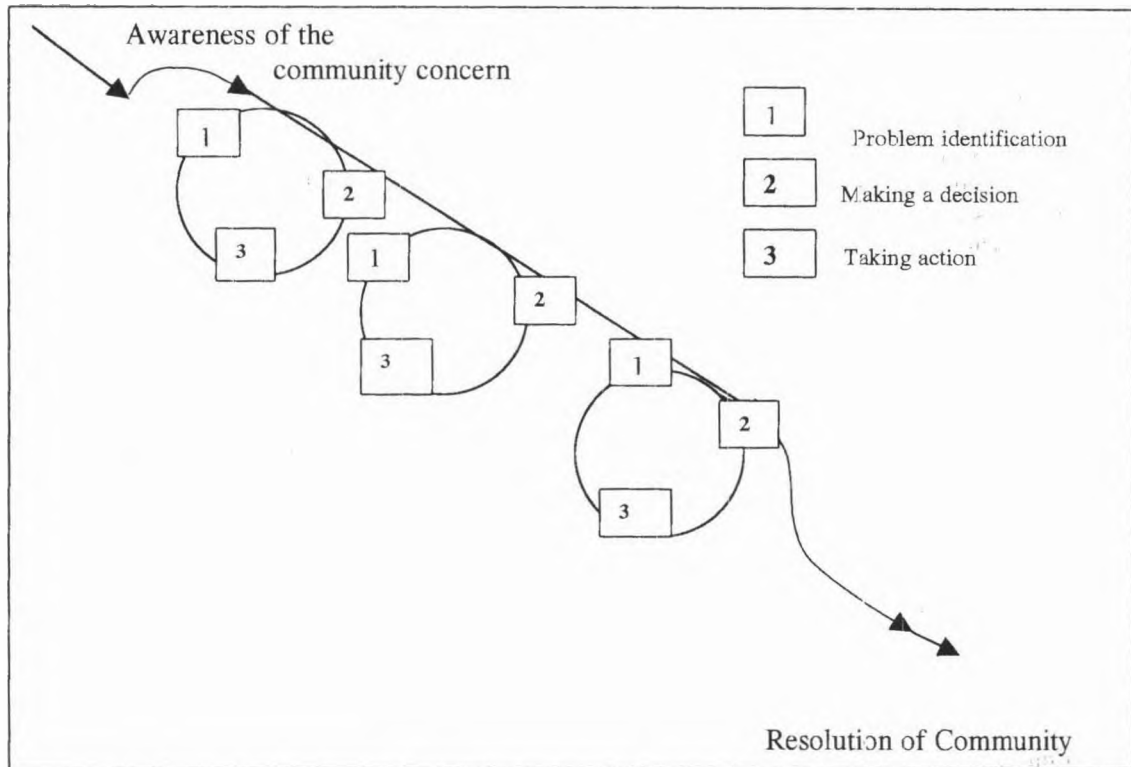

Figure 2: Community Development Process
Source: Cawley, Richard.1989. [3]

Results

This is the last stage in the Sustainable Community Development Model. This stage is the end result of all the processes that have been explained earlier. Successful accomplishment in the earlier stages will determine the success in this stage. The people in the community will experience not only a tremendous success of community development projects implemented but the projects are sustainable as well, if the earlier stages managed to perform the process successfully. Otherwise, the people in the community may not be able to experience successful outcomes of the projects.

CONCLUSION

The Model for Sustainable Community Development introduced in this paper has stressed on issue of how poor people in rural communities in this country could be helped effectively so that their income levels would be above the poverty line. As discussed earlier, there are tremendous efforts and money spent by both the government and private agencies in this country to help such people.

Despite having a tremendous effort and financial support from the government and the agencies involved in the programs, many of the community development projects that have been implemented

were not sustainable. Most of the community development projects remained "dead" or disappeared few years after the implementation date. The projects worked great just for the first few years of the implementation.

What went wrong? Why the community development projects introduced did not last longer or sustain? The Model for Sustainable Community Development (MSCD) discussed in this paper has explained in detail what and why most of the community development projects introduced and implemented in this country have faced difficulties experiencing success and sustain. MSCD, which consists of three major levels, has given a strong focus on the roles of community leaders to initiate community development projects in their communities. In addition to that, MSCD has also focused on commitment and involvement from the people in the communities and the available networking with internal and external resources.

It is hope that the model will be used as a guideline for the government and all other interested agencies to help developing communities in this country. If this occurs, the government of Malaysia and the agencies involved will no longer waste money and efforts on community development projects that do not produce adequate returns on the investment. This will benefit the people in the communities, as the government and the agencies involved will have more money to spend on other needs such as education, infrastructures and other social development.

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