

## ***Community Leadership***

The chief factor of success in community development is the availability of local leadership and a body of workers to carry out the programmes of community development. However, during the initial stages, regional community groups should have benefits of the services of community organizations and the persons who have understood the philosophy, objectives, methods and programmes of community development. But their help is to be available for a brief period and may be withdrawn as soon as the community is willing and able to shoulder its responsibilities or to carry out its programmes, (with the aid of a small number of eight members, if necessary.)

It means like any other organization a community needs determinative as well as directive leadership. Because leadership is important to lay down the policies, initiate programmes and supervise and control the organization. But it should always be clear that the concept of community leadership is completely different from the authoritarian approaches, hierarchical structures or directive approaches as it has its own particular arena and focus.

In it a person or group of people wishes to lead and guide others by defining common goals, listening, and understanding concerns, identifying solutions and negotiating for the best of the community and to lead by inspiring others to get involved in a caring, compassionate, thoughtful manner resulting in the community pride based on accomplishment. In short, community leadership is desired to facilitate the process of community development and to achieve the targets of community development programmes successfully.

It may be defined as:

“Community leadership is that which involves influence, power, and input into public decision-making over one or more spheres of activity. The spheres of activity may include an organization, an area of interest, an institution, a town, county or a region. Leadership capacity extends beyond the skills necessary to maintain a social service and/or activities of organization. While the leadership skills include those necessary for public decision-making, policy development, program implementation, and organizational maintenance”. (National Extension Task Force on Community Leadership)

(or)

“The phenomenon which facilitates the contagious communication of competent enthusiasm in situations of heartily-felt concern, mutual enjoyment and personal growth by discovering, developing and putting to work the varied competencies of people is known as social welfare leadership. This inspired leadership operates to define and to achieve group goals through the involvement and participation of people”.

### **Barriers and Challenges to Community Leadership:**

There may be some barriers and challenges to the community leadership such as:

- a. Apathy/Negative attitude
- b. Lack of education
- c. Lack of training
- d. Lack of resources

- e. Lack of organization
- f. Lack of new ideas
- g. Lack of volunteers
- h. Inability to bring people together
- i. Inappropriate communication because of language and cultural barriers
- j. Stress for time
- k. Fear and mistrust

## **Qualities of a Community Leader:**

So the question arises how the leadership should be developed or what kind of persons may take the leadership role so that the successful attainment of the community goals may become possible. To answer this question, some important attributes have been suggested by the sociologists as essential qualities of the community leaders which are as follows:

### **1) Focus on Community:**

Building a healthy, sustainable community should be the primary task of any community leader. Because developing an organizational culture built on joint interest of the entire community, is vital in establishing a clear vision for the community.

### **3) Courage and Conviction:**

Community leaders are faced with tough decisions on a regular basis. An example is the common theme of applied pressure from groups within the community that can be very convincing and forceful. So while considering matter before them, it is important for community leaders to have the courage to make the best decisions for the community at large and have the conviction to follow through on their decision and not flip-flop through special interest pressure.

### **2) Listening:**

The community leader should seek first to understand, then to be understood because it is said that people will only believe you if they think you understand them. So the leaders who are traditionally known for their decision-making and communication skills, must also focus on careful listening to understand their community.

### **4) Act with Integrity:**

It is important for a community leader to act with integrity i.e. to take responsibility when things go wrong and to be honest in all his/her dealings with the general public.

## **5) Foresight:**

The leader should have the ability to anticipate outcomes as they help him/her to understand experiences from the past, assess the present, and look into the future to foresee the likely results of a decision. Leaders with these characteristics are perceptive, anticipative and proactive.

## **6) Treat People Fairly:**

The community leader should show fairness and respect to all the community people and treat them on equal basis i.e. there should be no discrimination on the basis of race, caste, color, religion, language, etc. Everyone should be given equal importance and be heard with genuine interest by the community leader.

## **7) Keep Promises:**

One of the easiest ways to lose trust is to renege on promises. Therefore, it is important for a community leader to strive to make informed decisions and not to make commitments that cannot be fulfilled.

## **8) Seek New Things:**

It is important for a community leader to be open to new experiences and new ideas understanding that change is constant and that what worked yesterday may not be the right approach today. Having an attitude of being open to feedback is a gift that will help support and make better decisions by leaders. Because the need to look at better and more effective ways of delivering services in communities require leaders to look elsewhere for advice and examples.

## **9) Value Volunteers:**

It has been acknowledged by many that the heart and soul of healthy, sustainable, complete communities are the volunteers. That is why, the value of volunteers needs to be encouraged and recognized by the community leaders. As often these volunteer support groups within the communities go without proper recognition.

## **10) Partnerships:**

It is of paramount importance for community leaders to look beyond their inner circle and explore local and beyond partnerships with other organizations to provide for more diversification of service delivery. These shared services provide for greater flexibility and opportunity to expand to new, unchartered areas.

## **11) Express Appreciation:**

Say “thank you”. People need to be appreciated and community leaders should not miss an opportunity to acknowledge those who show an interest in their community. It does not cost

anything to thank someone for his or her help, advice or support or to praise others for their efforts rather it encourages the community participation even more.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of a Leader:**

The community leader has to play a number of responsibilities such as he/she should identify problems, organize issues, set goals, get feedback, organize game plan, motivate others, delegate and form committees, keep members on task, maintain accountability, recognizes strengths and weaknesses, maximizes resources, be inclusive, recognizes contributions and appreciate diversity. So that the target for which they are striving for could be achieved successfully.

He/she should follow through, lead by example. He/she should be a consensus builder, good communicator, motivator, negotiator, delegator, approachable, compassionate, and able to understand characteristics of community and to invest him/herself in the community.