

Sustainable Community Development

Sustainable community development is a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come. The term was used by the **Brundtland Commission** which coined what has become the most often-quoted definition of sustainable community development such as,

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs is called sustainable community development.”

While according to **Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED)**,

“Sustainable community development is the ability to make development choices which respect the relationship between the three “E’s”-economy, ecology, and equity:

- Economy - Economic activity should serve the common good, be self-renewing, and build local assets and self-reliance.
- Ecology - Humans are part of nature, nature has limits, and communities are responsible for protecting and building natural assets.
- Equity - The opportunity for full participation in all activities, benefits, and decision-making of a society.”

It means sustainability/sustainable community development is related to the quality of life in a community, i.e., whether the economic, social and environmental systems that make up the community are providing a healthy, productive and meaningful life for all community residents, present and future.

The sustainable community development cannot be achieved overnight. Rather we need to implement well-planned and organized strategies. But for this, first of all, members of the community must believe that they have the capacity to resolve their own problems and shape their own future. Because a spider’s web looks fragile but it can withstand extraordinary force with little damage. So strengthening the community’s capacity is like weaving a web that creates a social network throughout the community, providing support for all and extending and strengthening cooperation and collaboration among people, institutions, organizations, and businesses.

In this regard the following two developmental programmes are quoted as examples:

A) Orangi Pilot Project:

Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) is an urban based model/project. The Orangi Township is Pakistan’s largest *katchi abadi* located in the western part of Karachi. This *katchi abadi* was established in the 1960s and it now covers an area of 8000 acres. The 100,000 houses in the area are home to approximately one million people belonging to lower and lower-middle income groups (World Resource Institution, 1997). Like other slum localities in Pakistan, Orangi

Township lacked all civic amenities until 1980. So the OPP is a story of local people organising themselves and taking initiatives on their own to build basic infrastructure for their community.

Originally, the OPP was undertaken in 1980 as a demonstration by a renowned Pakistani social scientist, Akhtar Hameed Khan. He organised 20 families in one lane to work on a self-help basis to develop sewage and drainage system for the local community and a solid road network. Initially, the residents provided free labour to build the system, but they expected financial assistance from the government for the cost of materials. They soon realised that government assistance would not be forthcoming. Encouraged by Akhtar Hameed Khan, community members generated the necessary funds by contributing \$34 per house, and they provided labour on a purely voluntary basis. With the community's investment, the demonstration project was a success. Today, 72,000 households are served by sewers constructed by the residents of Orangi Township, with technical assistance from the OPP. The Orangi community has contributed US\$ 2 million to build a sewage system, which traditionally is the responsibility of the government (World Resource Institution, 1997).

Once the sewage programme proved successful, the OPP slowly expanded to other development initiatives: basic health and family planning, credit and savings for small enterprises, upgrading of physical and academic conditions of local schools, and women's participation in development. Health concerns were an important motivator, specifically among mothers and their children. However, because of women's segregation in this society, conventional gender development models proved to be inadequate. In some areas of Pakistan, customs, laws, religious beliefs and attitudes confine women to their homes. To overcome these obstacles, a mobile health-training clinic, consisting of women doctors and educators, was organised to meet with groups of women in small neighbourhoods. The OPP has strengthened the position of women in the Orangi community and has reinforced their participation in community activities.

In 1988, the project was upgraded and four autonomous institutions were established: (1) the OPP Research and Training Institute, (2) the Orangi Charitable Trust, (3) the Karachi Health and Social Development Association and (4) the OPP Society, which channels funds to these institutions from a Pakistani Charity, the Infaq Foundation. In 1992, a fifth institution called the Rural Development Trust was also established. The objective of these OPP institutions is to analyse outstanding problems with the help of the community members and to suggest viable solutions through technical assistance/advice, action research and education. These institutions have independent governing bodies with their own sources of income such as grants, donations and household contributions. All programmes are evaluated regularly and are modified on the basis of changing needs within the community. In essence, these programmes provide an enabling environment by mobilising local resources and by facilitating cooperative action through social and technical guidance.

Due to the success of the OPP, the Government of Pakistan and international donor agencies have replicated OPP's development strategy in other urban areas of Pakistan, after introducing necessary modifications to reflect local conditions and community needs.

The example of the OPP shows that the success of a community development initiative is not determined by the extent of the problem but it is determined by the extent of network resources that are mobilised to address the problem. The OPP development initiative has allowed residents to build new relationships and to launch themselves into self-organisation and self-sufficiency.

References:

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