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# **The Role of Adult Education and Skills Training in Promoting Planned Change and Localization: The Case of ACORD - NEBBI Community Development Programme in Uganda**

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**Abstract:** *The study explored the ways in which adult education and skills training programs can contribute to the achievement of equitable, self-reliant, and sustainable community development. Using a case study design, the research investigated the factors that support or hinder the ability of adult education programs to achieving equitable, self-reliant, and sustainable communities.*

## **Introduction and Purpose of Study**

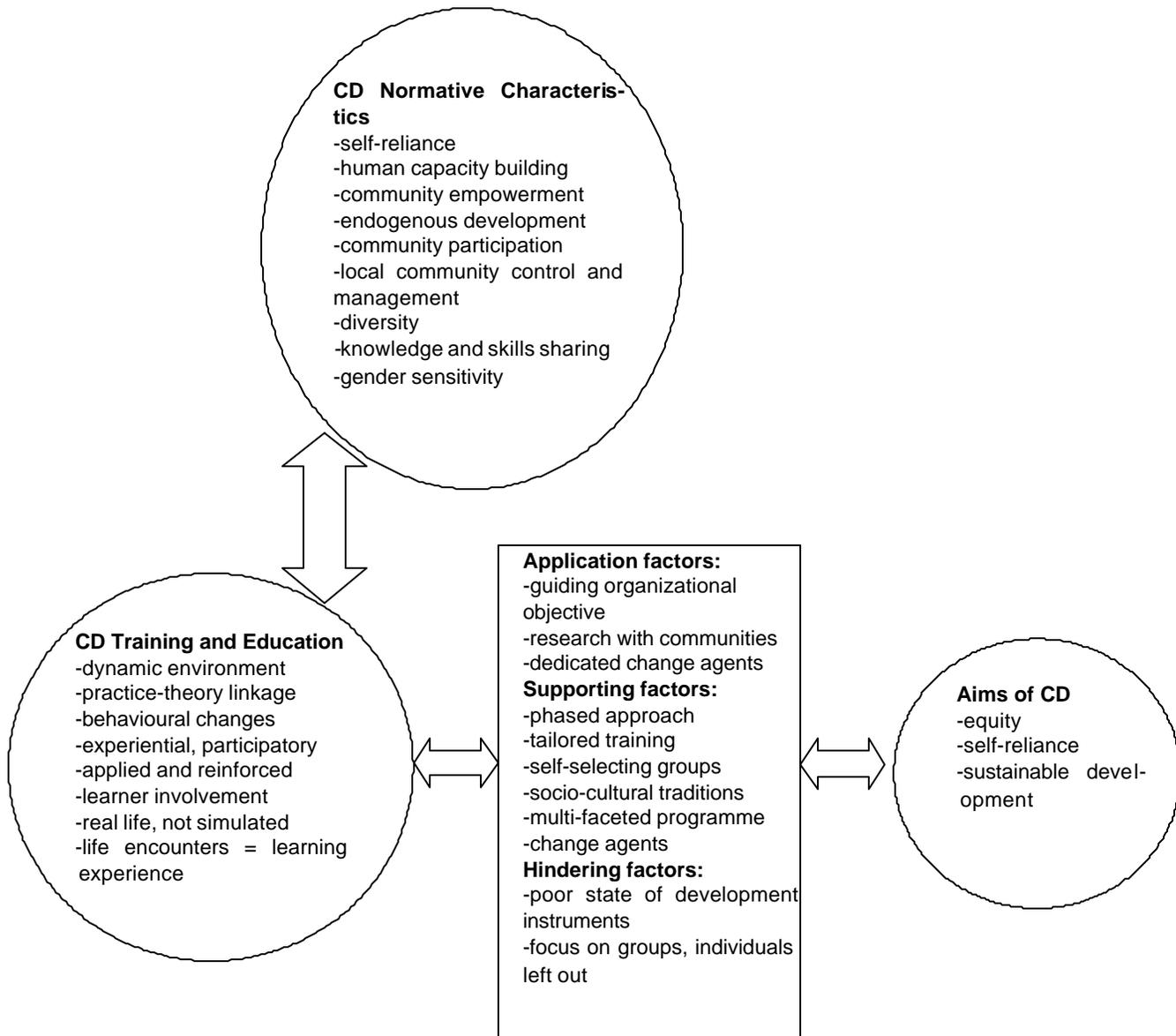
The Agency for Cooperation in Research and Development (ACORD), an international development consortium of European and Canadian non-governmental organizations with headquarters in Britain, was established in 1972 to implement long-term development programmes in parts of Africa where there are weak or non-existent local structures (Mafumbo, 1998). ACORD-NEBBI, an indigenous organization in Nebbi district in northwestern Uganda, has facilitated community development through the involvement of local people:

Fundamental to ACORD-NEBBI's philosophy is . . . responding to development needs . . . to promote the self-reliance of communities concerned . . . The implication of this philosophy is that ACORD is not the principal protagonist of the development process in any given context, but plays an essentially ancillary role, providing encouragement, technical advice and, where necessary, material support, but not the will to develop . . . [this] presupposes that a local protagonist of the development process exists. (Roberts, 1985, p.5)

The purpose of the study was to explore the role of education and training programs in promoting community development. In particular, it sought to identify how such programs can contribute to the achievement of equitable, self-reliant, and sustainable community development. The research question that guided the study was: What factors support or hinder the ability of ACORD-NEBBI education and training programs in contributing to the achievement of equitable, self-reliant, and sustainable community development initiatives? This question is important because education and training, as vectors in sharing knowledge and skills, operate in dynamic environments where several factors influence their effectiveness in promoting development objectives.

The study was conducted using a case study design. The three sources of data used were taped semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. Forty-six volunteer participants drawn from community development workers, former participants of ACORD-NEBBI education and training programs, the development programme personnel, and primary beneficiary groups affiliated with the programme, were interviewed. The first fieldwork was conducted in May/June 1998, and a second visit was carried out in November, 1998. In the following section, I present a discussion of the study's key findings as summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: A Summary of the Key Findings**



**Methods and Content of Education and Training Curricula at ACORD-NEBBI**

Based on a review of the principles of adult learning (Cross, 1982; Freire, 1972; Houle, 1996; Jarvis, 1987; Kidd, 1977; Knowles, 1982; Lovett, 1980; Lynch, 1977; Ottoson, 1994, 1995; Thompson, 1980) and community development (Boothroyd and Davis, 1991; Campfens, 1997; Nozick, 1990) a descriptive analysis of ACORD-NEBBI's education and training activities reveals eight specific conclusions. First, training is particularly important to or-

ganizations and people who are in situations that are very dynamic, and for people who have limited time to spend in a learning environment. Second, education and training are two separate activities, with very different methods and results. The primary goal of education is wisdom or ultimate knowledge, and that wisdom or knowledge is for its own sake and not for what it enables its owner to do, be, or become. Training, the dominant approach at ACORD-NEBBI programme, is specifically related to what a person can do from a practical per-

spective. Third, training, not education, is essential to the kinds of immediate behaviour changes necessary to make a group functional with determined organizational work objectives. The village communities needed immediate development to improve their lives, both as a collective, and as individuals. Fourth, training is best when it is experiential, participatory, and adapted to trainees' previous experience, learning style, and a favourable language as a medium of instruction. Training beneficiaries attested that not only did the training utilize their own communities' situations as a method to introduce the concepts, knowledge, and analytical skills, but also used their collective personal experiences to reflect on the root causes of the problems faced, and from which options for change evolved.

Fifth, training is most effective and long lasting when it is related directly to the tasks to be performed, and timed so that these tasks are the direct result of the training and can be viewed through effective performances by those being trained. Learning is enhanced when the behaviours and skills being learned are applied and reinforced. Sixth, training is most effective when trainees involve themselves in shaping the training agenda, format, objectives, and methods, negotiate the training methods as the training proceeds, and evaluate both their own and the trainer's performance. Seventh, learning is effective when the learning situation best approximates the situation in which the learning will be used. Trainees learn to be effective practitioners by successfully going through those processes, which are identified with effectiveness, and by going through them in the course of real, not simulated learning. Practitioners do not learn to be effective participants by listening to lectures on decision making or policy making. And eighth, every training encounter is a learning experience. The nature and the quality of the learning both depend upon how that experience is integrated within what the learner had identified as useful.

#### **Supporting and Hindering Factors in the ACORD-NEBBI Programme**

The study identified six factors that support the ability of education and training programs in contributing to the achievement of equitable, self-reliant, and sustainable community development: a) the application of a phased approach to change and localization that allowed the programme personnel

to reflect and learn from their experiences, and accordingly made appropriate changes based on what they had learned; b) delivery of tailored training programs at the request and pace of the beneficiaries; c) support to, and promotion of self-selecting group formation based on common interests that in turn allowed the functioning of groups with less social friction; d) application of a development approach that is compatible with the socio-cultural traditions; e) the pursuit of multi-faceted programme that penetrated the village communities; and f) the use of change agents that supported emerging community groups.

Two factors were identified as hindering the ability of ACORD-NEBBI education and training programs to contribute to the achievement of equitable, self-reliant, and sustainable community development: a) the poor state of development instruments, and b) missed target groups - the poorest of the poor - who could not form groups through which training is delivered. The latter factor exists because the programme focuses on groups, and hence individuals who could not form or join the self-selecting groups were left out of the development process. Thus, the lower middle class strata of the village communities have benefited the most because they already had the basic resources - work capacity, knowledge, and capital - with which to gain access, influence and the most needed savings mobilization prior to group formation. The majority of the rural poor do not possess these important resources.

#### **Recommendations**

##### *For Future Research within Community Development Initiatives*

The study identified factors that support or hinder the ability of education and training programs in contributing to the achievement of equitable, self-reliant, and sustainable community development initiatives. A first suggested area for future research is to pursue a comparative study on the principles of adult learning, especially on how they are reflected in education and training initiatives in community development settings in similar contexts. The applicability of the principles of adult learning and their integration in education and training programs to different community development efforts, having similar general circumstances, could then be determined. This would be the basis for a comparison between communities regarding the causal relation-

ship between inputs (education and training) and outcomes (the effectiveness of community development practice) in effecting planned change and localization.

A second area for future investigation relates to the nature of planning education and training programs, rather than on their delivery. Identifying the opportunities and constraints encountered in the process of program planning may provide more insights into the human dynamics of educational planning within the community development context.

A third recommendation for future research is to carry out a longitudinal study that addresses the implementation and outcomes of education and training programs, which are embedded in community development projects. Such a study would help highlight the influencing factors associated with internalization of knowledge and skills, their application through implementation of group activities, and their resulting outcomes which all occur long after participants have attended relevant education and training programs.

#### *For Practice on Community Development, Education and Training*

In the area of collaboration, ACORD-NEBBI's experience suggests that close collaboration between development agencies, government institutions, and communities is possible, especially if it builds upon a community's determination, interests, and needs. To attempt to initiate any form of development from outside the community and one that is pre-determined is unlikely to trigger increased community participation. Thus, NGOs need to identify how they might best support what already exists in the community. This implies that NGOs need to work on their comparative advantage over the government, in regard to their unique relationship with intended community beneficiaries, and their capacity to supplement, rather than compete with government initiatives. Indeed, recognizing the role government continues to play in the promotion or regulation of the third sector will be equally important to the successful collaboration between development agencies, government institutions, and community groups in an effort to achieve equitable, self-reliant, and sustainable community development.

In the area of community health education, a challenge that ACORD-NEBBI education and

training experience reveals is the need to develop a more vigorous community-collaboration health education program. At the time of the study ACORD-NEBBI was engaged in the training of community workers (TCW) program. The study revealed a general sentiment from the local workers that they felt powerless in the face of epidemics such as cholera. It would therefore be useful for development agencies similar to ACORD-NEBBI to develop a collaborative community education and training program that enhances community-coping mechanisms in the wake of such epidemics, or better still, how to prevent them from occurring. This is important because a country's national wealth or prosperity is directly dependent on the health of its people and communities.

#### *For Policy Making on Community Development Education and Training*

On support to local structures, this study found that it is a challenge to achieve the right balance of support to different levels (parish, county, district, and region) with that extended to the village community level. This is evident in ACORD's shift in greater emphasis on institutional building to the promotion of the self-selecting group formation in the 1990s. It is also a challenge to ensure that the least influential or unheard voices (women, the poor groups) are factored into the localization process. And this is why ACORD-NEBBI placed a deliberate emphasis on gender sensitive planning across all programme activities, and ensured a set proportion of its resources were directed specifically to the vulnerable segments of the community. While developing countries continue to seek partners that will support them to create the conditions which foster local development, it is the immediate support extended to local community associations and groups, as found in the ACORD-NEBBI case, that will undoubtedly enhance community efforts in achieving self-reliance. This indeed is the measurable result of a localization programme.

In regard to poverty alleviation, the ACORD-NEBBI experience reveals that efforts that empower also create more opportunities and encourage active participation of marginalized segments of the community in social, political and economic spheres. And in this regard, material poverty is a potential barrier to accessing available opportunities. ACORD's community consultation process defines poverty as the ultimate result of political

and social injustice (ACORD Introduction to Strategic Plan, 1997-2001). In the poverty definition, a strategy for achieving community empowerment concerns "efforts directed at the most obvious victims of all forms of poverty . . . Starting with one at the very core of individual marginalization and societal breakdown: the lack of social capital. In all arenas, ACORD endeavours to promote this ability in each individual in order to take an active part in the community" (ACORD Annual Report, 1997, p.2).

Following the changing priorities of ACORD-NEBBI, as identified in its 3-phase approach, one main lesson it provides is that institutional building has limitations when the development effort is targeted at localization, especially in poverty alleviation. Accountability remains, almost exclusively, to institutional authorities that are accountable to their own superiors. As has been observed in the case of self-selecting groups, it is reasonable to conclude that an approach that emphasizes strengthening local structures appears to be a much more sustainable and equitable option, because the executives of groups are accountable to the group members who are personally known to each other.

### Conclusion

This study has explored the role of education and training programs in promoting community development. Using ACORD-NEBBI as a case the study identified the factors that support or hinder the ability of education and training programs in contributing to the achievement of equitable, self-reliant, and sustainable community development initiatives.

The current trend toward globalization of trade and economies and the resulting outcome – poverty stricken communities – implies that coming decades will undoubtedly require greater attention to vulnerable groups affected by both local and international forces of market liberalization. This study has confirmed that community development programmes that first focus on the establishment of local structures in rural communities where they are either weak or non-existent is an appropriate approach to foster long-term, improved quality of life for the "victims" of market forces. The study further confirmed that poverty is much more than insufficient income. Poverty encompasses a lack of socio-economic and political security as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to empower the vulnerable. It is poverty that breeds a lack of hope,

limits choices, and erode social values which in turn leads to a sense that life is without meaning. However, education and skills training reverses this thinking in the majority of the vulnerable people. And when education and training is embedded in community development programmes, not only does it reinforce hope, but also creates a viable alternative to "free" the materially and intellectually poor from powerlessness which is such a prominent feature of poverty.

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