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Social Action Advocacy: A Means for Development

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ABSTRACT

Social action is a process, may be used most effectively by individuals and groups who choose to work toward bringing about certain changes in their community or area. This paper deals with the conceptualization of social action, where the process of social action has been defined and explained by various authors in their respective interpretations. Further it explains and talks about the ways by which social action can be achieved, Advocacy is one of them. The process of advocacy, case and causes of advocacy which works along for the social change in the society including the role of civil societies in social action in general.

Keywords: Social Action, Development, Advocacy, Civil Societies.

I. INTRODUCTION

The success of any community or area development plan depends in large part on how effectively the plan mobilizes human and non-human resources during the phase of action. If not carried through to action or completion the best plans are of little consequence; they accomplish little beyond providing a stimulating exercise for the planners. Mobilizing the resources of a community or area to achieve the goals of development is a process of social action. Whether the project be a new golf course, an area vocational training school, a labour survey, a nursing home or a community education program or anything else, the process of attaining the objective is social action since it depends on motivating key people and organizations to participate actively in the action necessary to accomplish the development objectives. Social action is a process, may be used most effectively by individuals and groups who choose to work toward bringing about certain changes in their community or area. Changes in a community or area may result from forces within, from forces originating outside the community or area, or (as usually is the case) from both. Changes occurring as the result of outside forces are often not planned for by the system (organization, community, or area) undergoing change. In fact, most often these outside factors are beyond the direct control of the system. These forces will probably continue to have an effect regardless of the actions taken by

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the individual community or area. Indeed, it is often the effect of such outside forces which prompts initiation of development projects and programs within areas and communities.

This paper deals with the conceptualization of social action, where the process of social action has been defined and explained by various authors in their respective interpretations. Further it explains and talks about the ways by which social action can be achieved, Advocacy is one of them. The process of advocacy, case and cause advocacy which works along for the social change in the society. And the role of civil societies in social action in general.

II. SOCIAL ACTION

Social action can be defined as methods to bring changes or prevent changes in contemporary social practices or situations, through education, persuasion, or pressure on behalf of objectives believed by the sociologist to be socially desirable. Generally social action involves organised efforts to influence the opinion of public or official policy or executive action with the support of groups or individuals.

The writings on social action, with some notable exceptions, are complete with articles that are ideological in tone and linguistic in style. They usually propose a social goal and then invite, stimulate, encourage, or sermonize the reader to pursue it through a series of related action, there are articles that attempt to define and identify stages in the social action process.

According to **Max Weber**, no action shall be called a social action unless it has relationship with the present, past or future behaviour of others in the society, who are not necessarily known persons or may be unknown individuals as well. Social action includes both failures to act and possess acquiescence may be oriented to the past, present or accepted further behaviour of others. **Weber** argued that to explain an action we must interpret it in terms of its subjectively intended meaning. A person's action is to be explained in terms of the consequences, he or she intended purpose rather than in terms of its actual effects the two are often at variance. A subjectively intended meaning is also a usual explanation of the action, in that the end in view is a cause of present actions. For Weber it is important that action is defined in terms of meaningfulness and sociological analysis must proceed by identifying the meaning that actions have for actors.

There has been marked off five elements in the process: researching the problem; planning a solution; enlisting public support; presenting the proposal to those with authority for adoption; and enforcement or execution of the new policy.²

²John G. Hill, "Social Action," in Social Work Year Book, 1951 (New York: National Association of Social

Solender's defines social action as "a process of individuals, groups, or intergroup endeavour, within the context of social work philosophy, knowledge, and skill. He then lays out a process consisting of three methods: re- search, on the basis of which certain recommendations are made; organized advocacy of a public policy and gaining support for the policy; and direct efforts to influence policymakers through such action as letter writing, testifying, conferencing, and soliciting the sup- port of public officials.³

Fitch, for example, in one of the first articles on social action to appear in the Social Work Year Book, wrote: "*Social action is not only concerted as opposed to individual action but it involves legal methods as opposed to illegal, and objectives that are social in character or effect as opposed to those that are anti-social.*"⁴

Paull, develops the same concept: social action refers to those planned and organised efforts that aim to change how status, power, and resources are distributed in society. Power and the redistribution of resources are the central concerns; specific goals, methods, auspices, and outcomes are incidental. He, more than others, links the study and analysis of social action to the theory of social conflict, particularly as it is developed by Coser. For Paull, the key concepts are power and conflict, and social action is associated with movements that seek to influence the allocation of societal re- sources.⁵

III. MEANING OF SOCIAL ACTION

Social action means "a strategy to obtain limited social change at the intermediate or macro levels of society which is generally used in no consensus situations and employs both 'norm-adhering' and 'norm-testing' modes of intervention."⁶ Three concepts are fundamental to this definition: the scope of change, the use of power in effecting and resisting change, and the change strategies employed.

The scope of social change, since social action is essentially a method of effecting or preventing social change, the single most important concept in its study is social change, which may be defined as a process of "significant alterations in the structure and functioning of determinate social systems. As change occurs at various societal levels, it is necessary to identify the specific level where the strategy of social action is uniquely usable.

Figure 1 presents the scope of change envisioned by social action. This conceptualization

Workers, 1951), pp. 456

³ *ibid*

⁴ John A. Fitch, "Social Action," in *Social Work Year Book*, 1939 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1939).

⁵ Joseph E. Paull, "Social Action for a Different Decade," *Social Service Review* 45 (March 1971): 35.

⁶ *ibid*.

distinguishes social action as a method of change from casework, group work, and other internal administrative and organizational efforts to modify behaviours, relationships, and practices of individuals, families, groups, and agencies; it also distinguishes it from revolutions that aim to transform the entire social, economic, and political structure. The purpose of distinguishing social action from revolution is not to shut off revolution from the attention of the student of social action or to pronounce it as necessarily less desirable a goal or less efficient a strategy than social action. The purpose is simply to point out the essential difference between the two. Identifying this difference helps one to understand the meaning, purpose, limits, and possibilities of social.

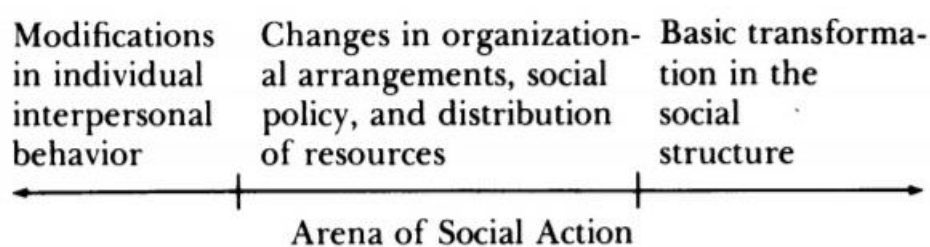


FIG. 1.—The social change continuum

The use of power. A second major consideration in social action is the role of power. One cannot intelligently engage in social action without understanding the location and distribution of power, including its legitimate form, authority, in the relevant intermediate or macro social system. Whether one seeks to effect or obstruct a proposed change, a key requirement is power—the generalized ability to affect behaviours of individuals, decisions of organizations, policies of major institutions, and the distribution of resources in a community. But power is differentially distributed within any organization or community. Some individuals have more, others less. The questions—*which group has more and when, and which group has less and why?*—have resulted in a recurring debate among social scientists in which the ideology, methodology, and disciplinary affiliation of the investigator seem to play a major role in influencing final answers.

Strategies of change. How this is done, of course, is a matter of strategy, and this is a third fundamental concept in social action. Unlike community development and social planning, social action is generally undertaken in the absence of either a popular or legislative mandate. More often than not, there is little likelihood of gaining consensus around the goals of change, which almost invariably involves some redistribution of societal resources. As a result, the social actionist is pushed to abandon consensus and to pursue no consensus styles of

intervention.

Advocacy was identified as a professional role as far back as 1887, and social workers consider client advocacy an ethical responsibility. Warren classifies purposive change strategies into three types: collaborative, campaign, and contest.⁷

Collaborative strategies are based on the consensus approach to change; they assume the existence of a rather unified community, homogeneous interests, agreement on social goals and means, and the probability of cooperation among the major segments of the community. Anticipated opposition to change is assumed not to be based on vested interests, but on misinformation, ignorance, and general community apathy. Given these circumstances, the action plan is to weld a consensus through strategies of rationality and education, persuasion and collaboration, the change agent being principally an enabler or catalyst.

Campaign strategies assume a lack of agreement based primarily on apathy and misinformation about significant issues. The change agent seeks to gain the consent of the opposition through persuasion, using such techniques as educational and publicity campaigns, letter writing, endorsement of prestige figures, propaganda, and public relations.

Contest strategies assume a lack of agreement based on positive opposition to the change agent's proposal; a state exists in which neither cooperation nor persuasion is likely to succeed. The contest must be joined. This is usually done by noisy and norm-testing tactics such as nonviolent resistance, protests, boycotts, strikes, teach-ins, sit-ins, and demonstrations. In these situations, the social actionist clearly reinterprets, stretches, tests, or even violates existing norms.

IV. CHARACTERISTIC OF SOCIAL ACTION

- Social action is concerned with changes in contemporary social practices.
- Social action involves a goal accepted as necessary and worthwhile by the social actionists.
- Social action always involves an attempt to bring about action by people other than the social actionist.
- Social action may include methods such as education, propaganda, persuasion or pressure but it does not recommend physical coercion or compulsion.
- Social action to be identified with certain method and procedures rather than certain social values.

⁷ Roland L. Warren, *Truth, Love, and Social Change* (Chicago: Rand-McNally & Co., 1971).

V. ADVOCACY: AN INSTRUMENT FOR SOCIAL ACTION

Social Action advocacy is the whole representation of a client(s) or a cause in a forum, attempting to systematically influence decision-making in an unjust or unresponsive system(s). Social action seeks equality of rights and opportunities for all the people in a number of realms. A major way of assisting social action is through social advocacy. Advocacy for social action serves to inspire the community to turn out to help the deprived section to shape their future dream. The community is thus sensitized into proper action being influenced by the noble brand of concepts couched in program component of sectoral policy. It is beginning to leave much of its negative habit of minds coming in contact with advocacy group. This is a stimulus response paradigm that empirically conceptualizes the nature of social mobilization with the involvement of the exogenous forces of development.

(A) Definition of Advocacy

The act or process of supporting a cause or proposal: the act or process of advocating something. Advocacy is speaking acting, writing with minimal conflict of interest on behalf of the sincerely perceived interests of a disadvantaged person or group to promote, protect and defend their welfare and justice by: being on their side and no-one else's, being primarily concerned with their fundamental needs, remaining loyal and accountable to them in a way which is definite and vigorous and which is, or is likely to be, costly to the advocate or advocacy group. It is a set of organized actions aimed at influencing public policies, social attitudes, or political processes. Advocacy can include the following:

Enabling and empowering people to speak for themselves; Giving support to a policy and persuading those with power to act in support of the policy at local, national, and international levels. Gaining and exercising power to influence a political action; and Organizing efforts by citizens to influence the formulation and implementation of public policies and programs by persuading and pressuring state authorities, international financial institutions, and other powerful actors.

The advocacy process involves a number of interrelated actions strategically designed to effect change at various levels. These actions might include increasing community awareness of the issue, creating constituent pressure to push for reform, improving the state response to prevent and punish human rights violations, and influencing law and policy-making.

The advocacy process involves a number of interrelated actions strategically designed to effect change at various levels. These actions might include increasing community awareness of the issue, creating constituent pressure to push for reform, improving the state response to prevent

and punish human rights violations, and influencing law and policy-making. Before initiating action, advocates for change should identify the purpose of the advocacy campaign. The purpose may range from solving a specific problem by changing a law or policy to raising general awareness about human rights violations in a specific community.

Advocacy can involve one case (many times an individual or family) requiring some kind of change, which is known as **case advocacy**. The goal of case advocacy is often to meet individual's absolute need, or the basic goods and services that support human survival in the short term (water, food, shelter, sanitation, medical care). It may also take the form of a larger structural or systematic effort to change policies, common practices, procedures and laws to advance social justice for a larger segment of society which is known as **cause advocacy**. Cause advocacy necessitates the person to be knowledgeable about social action and ways to create social changes. The goal of cause advocacy involve causes that impact a group of people and like case advocacy can encompass relative needs, which are the goods and services that promote employment, equal status before law, social justice, quality education, and equal opportunity. This type of advocacy is done through social actions, which further can be used for change as at a broader reach in the community.

Yet the response is two-fold: positive and negative. The enlightened society is quick at responding to the call for social action; backward community responds either negatively with stubborn resistance or slowly. Policy advocacy role of change catalysts and development practioners is to galvanize the sleepy Community of the traditional sector to use its dormant potentials and resources in the race for socio-economic achievement.

The marked feature of the on-going dynamics of advocacy is the declaration of a special week/day. This has happened to be a conventional demonstration of the highly enthusiastic urban participants. The govt. had made it a periodic commemoration in its commitment to UN declaration. It tries to show its priority concerns for empowerment of the disadvantaged as well as for carrying forward social movement against environmental degradation for the establishment of human right. The observance of the special week/days by way of rallies, human, chain symposium and cultural function has been taken to be the important dimension of policy advocacy to focus the issues relating to human development policy-area and sub-sectors. Despite alarming indications of violence in transitional societies torn between conflicting values the social volunteers are playing a vital role with bold initiative and ventures in changing the scenario with consistent advocacy for change. They are activists for governance receiving directions from the policy communities, civil societies and NGOs.

Advocacy is led by advocates or, when they are organized in groups as is the case most of the time, advocacy groups. Advocacy groups as defined by Young and Everett are different from political parties which "seek to influence government policy by governing." They are "any organization that seeks to influence government policy, but not to govern." This definition includes social movements, sometimes network of organizations which are also focused on encouraging social change. Social movements try to either influence governments or, like the environmental movement, to influence people's ideas or actions.

Nevertheless, community participation presupposes a modicum of public control to protect the interests of the commoners against domineering interest group. Growing partnership between policy community and the public is usually developed by the civil societies. Even community participation may go to the extent of peaceful demonstration for awareness building, promotion of consumers' preference for goods and services and protection against violence. Organized citizen bodies including registered NGOs provide for institutionalizing policy advocacy. It complements the interest groups in raising mass awareness. The marked feature of policy advocacy is the functional relation of policy actors with registered associations and NGOs. Such organizations play a vital role in awareness building and advocating social change, humans right and sustainable development. A plenty of such organizations demonstrate organizational capacity to hold seminars, workshop and dialogue on vital policy issues to mould public opinion. They are up and doing to resist such policy action that goes against humans' rights.

VI. NGOS: INSTRUMENT FOR SOCIAL ACTION

NGOs are voluntary organization s (VOs). These are popularly known as NGOs because they are free from governmental control in their functioning. They are democratic and open to all those wishing to become member of the organization voluntarily and serve the society. Over the past decade NGOs have dedicated more resources and given a higher priority to influencing and advocacy work at all levels (local, national, and international levels). These trends have been driven by a number of factors. Perhaps the most fundamental of these has been a deeper understanding of the causes of poverty and marginalisation.

There are efficient and dynamic NGOs with a reassured commitment to human development. Given the magnitude of the challenge of the new millennium NGOs have come to develop collaboration not only with the government but also with a vast array of social institutions with diverse ideologies and objectives. These institutions are not close development partners of NGOs but qualified agents of civil society. Even then they contribute to social movement to

protect environment and vulnerable groups like women, children, slum dwellers and ethnic minorities as potential partners of NGOs. Potential partnership is deemed essential for advocacy in the areas like human right, women rights, and cultural activities and media participation. NGOs endeavour to pursue their policy advocacy role as close development partner of govt. based on 'shared governance'. This is open and legitimate partnership between the state and NGO. It entails greater involvement of NGOs and their constituencies in policy formulation, planning, management and implementation of development programs. In non-formal education sub-sector, for illustration, NGOs advocacy role in the spirit of partnership deserves mention.

VII. CONCLUSION

Social action doesn't always mean gathering the troops and marching on City Hall with fire in your eyes. It certainly can, and there are many times when that's appropriate. But it can also mean testifying at a legislative hearing, going door to door to talk to voters about an upcoming election, filing a lawsuit, meeting with a representative of a regulatory body to demand proper enforcement of already-existing rules, or paying a visit to your congressman with a group of fellow citizens. Social action often means refusing to follow the rules laid down by those in power, and exercising instead the right to protest and contest unfair or ill-conceived policies and decisions. It is meant to empower communities that have been abused, neglected, or treated unfairly by authority or the society as a whole, and to give them a voice and some authority of their own. By drawing attention to inequity and injustice, and by using unified action to confront – or cooperate with – policy makers and the society as a whole, a social action strategy can bring about significant social change.
