

SOCIAL WORK, MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY ORGANISING AND THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY: A FARSIGHTED APPROACH TO THE MARGINALISED

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ABSTRACT

In rebuffing a status quo position to social work and community development from using conventional medical model to solving social problems, this article however gained influence from views of late Professor Maurice Moreau's Structural Social Work approach. The paper discussed multicultural community organizing in relation to ethnic minorities in Nigeria. This was tersely based on literatures generated from secondary data and lived experiences of the researchers. It looks at Multicultural Community Organizing (MCO) as a premise to providing an alternative vision for social work practice in the 21st century. Discuss Analysis was used to unearth the structural tendencies that influence 'opportunist oppressions' against the ethnic minorities in Nigeria. It also stares at other relevant issues such as multiculturalism and Nigerian state, and challenges in multicultural community organizing in Nigeria. Power was examined with reference to empowerment and the need for social actions in: maximizing client resources; reducing power inequalities in client-worker relationships; unmasking the primary structures of oppression; facilitating a collective consciousness; fostering activism with social movements; and encouraging responsibility for feelings and behaviours leading to individual, group and community social change. The study recommended educational approach, participation/involvement approach; capacity building and skill acquisition as integral components of MCO. These will help to blend communities irrespective of culture, race, sex, gender, occupation, education and ability so that they can be significantly empowered.

Keywords: Multicultural community organizing, Community development, social work, structural social work, Nigeria society

INTRODUCTION

The late 20th century was an experimental period in Nigerian society with respect to Multiculturalism. The challenge facing social work today is to examine her professional roles and purpose in addressing the problem of the marginalized, especially the ethnic minority groups in Nigeria. This is particularly true in all the political zones and states of Nigeria, where large economic transformations have not touched some of the segments of the country. Thus, only few individuals are gaining direct benefits from the economic growth (Newman, 2005) of the country. No longer are jobs secured, higher education affordable, or income supports measures provided to help those marginalized and displaced by these broad social controls. The role of social work in addressing these issues is particularly controversial, as our profession has been identified by some people as not doing enough to curtail the current crisis both in learning and practice. What is the role of community organizing within this context? How can we take an active role in confronting and bringing to a halt those social and economic trends that increase inequality and remove discrimination in Nigeria? Is this an issue of power or mere 'chauvinist' control? Given the growing diversity in Nigerian society, we propose that a multicultural community organizing approach to community development practice can be one avenue for responding to the challenges in a proactive manner. Therefore, it is important to create methods that will develop marginalised communities while building coalitions between different ethnic groups could be another strategy for working toward greater social justice. This therefore proposes a way to work in partnership with communities to confront the assaults experienced by individuals, families, and communities of ethnic minority.

Methodology

This paper succinctly is based on literatures originated from secondary data and lived experiences of the researchers. Generally, discuss analysis (Lukes, 2005; Morriss, (2002) was used as a methodology. The focus will be on defining the concept of Multicultural Community Organizing (MCO) and ways in which it can provide an alternative vision for practice in the 21st century. We will try and incorporate structural social work where the 'opportunistic oppression' against the ethnic minorities will be addressed structurally. This paper also looks at other relevant issues like multiculturalism and Nigerian state, and challenges in multicultural community organizing. Educational approach, participation/involvement approach and capacity building and skill recognition are also emphasized in this scholarly work of mine as integral components of MCO in order to blend the communities irrespective of culture, race, sex, gender, occupation, education and ability. The development of multicultural practice, however, has its own challenges and contradictions. Therefore, this paper will also focus on some of these issues and ways in which they can be addressed. Only by focusing on Nigeria's potentials and challenges, can the people of Nigeria engage in creative and positive change.

Multiculturalism and the Nigerian State

Multiculturalism has merely been illuminated but has not been practiced considerably in official capacities in Nigeria. Yet, the policy has survived more than a quarter of a century in the lips of ordinary Nigerians as well as the mass media. At the beginning of the 21st century, it was well poised to continue its history of controversy, contradictions and challenges. Nigeria as a capitalist state with viable social and economic policies is a multicultural state and although without egalitarian principles in its practice. Generally, in principle, it is 'governed by the dialectics of equal opportunity for its citizens' (Sennett, 2003). Before the Nigerian Civil War, Nigeria did not address the problem of cultural diversity in any form to include the visible ethnic minorities. Nigeria's official policy of multiculturalism, entitled 'Multiculturalism within an Ethnic Framework' was first discussed in Lagos after the coup d'etat of 1966 (Joackim, 2014).

“In the aftermath of the failed coup d'etat of 1966 which was viewed as ethnic based, there have been deliberate moves to forge Nigerians into a system of government that tries to "homogenize" the diverse economic, political and religious cultures in the country. These attempts included for instance, the take-over of Christian schools and the regional universities by the federal military government in the 1970s, the deployment of soldiers as governors or administrators in states other than their own and with traditions and cultures different from those of their states of origin and finally, the surreptitious enrolment of Nigeria in the Organization of Islamic States. These shots were aimed at making Nigeria a single homogenous state by eroding the social and cultural autonomy of the regions that constitute the Federal Republic of Nigeria" (Joackim, 2014:14).

Owing to the fact that the role of other ethnic groups other than Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba in Nigeria was not recognized initially and put as secondary issue led some of these marginalized groups to raise alarm about their relative position in the society especially the Niger Deltans who suffered environmental mishaps and have contributed immensely to the building of Nigeria. This made it possible for a slight shift from triangular-culturalism to Multiculturalism (Breton, 2012). The purpose of the multiculturalism discuss of 1973 was to encourage individuals and members of all ethnic groups in Nigeria to maintain and share their language and cultural heritage with other Nigerians. This gave room to the establishment of National Youths Service Corps (NYSC) in 1973.

The NYSC scheme was created in a bid to reconstruct, reconcile and rebuild the country after the Nigerian Civil war [see decree No.24 of 22nd May 1973].

This was expected to build personal and collective confidence among members of all ethnic groups irrespective of race, gender, and class. The assumption here is to promote tolerance of diversity and positive inter-group attitudes (Jackson and Holvino, 1988). Contrary, the central structure ignored the integrative value of ethnic heterogeneity, arbitrating it to be inimical to broader interests. Governments instead focused on time-honoured strategies that emphasized the virtues of assimilation as essential for national unity and property.

The assimilation in this case reflected a commitment to Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba conformity. This is similar to what we could call the 'American melting pot ideology' (Ibrahim and Igbuzor, 2002). Yet, it was difficult for the visible ethnic minorities in Nigeria to understand. According to Ezeh (1990) the British cultural presence in Nigeria and the increasing American presence have helped to weaken and lead to fear of loss of cultural identity of the ethnic minorities in Nigeria. This is as a result of the misconception of their language and tradition, socio-economic and marital values in the multicultural philosophy.

However, in 2000 a "Bill was proposed for the preservation and enhancement of Multiculturalism in Nigeria" (Ukoh, 2001). The Bill was submitted to the National Assembly although with minor organizational amendments. The amendments did not recognize the political emancipation of the ethnic minorities or the need to include their languages at least as one of the official Nigerian languages even though the Bill was not presented at the National Assembly officially since it is a mock-up of Canadian system. The Bill contains the following:

- recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Nigerian society and acknowledge the freedom of all members of Nigerian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage;
- recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristics of the Nigerian heritage and identity and it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Nigeria's future;
- promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Nigerian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to such participation;
- recognize the existence of communities whose members share a common origin and their historic contribution to Nigerian society, and enhance their development;
- encourage and assist the social, cultural, economic and political institutions of Nigeria to be respectful and inclusive of Nigeria's multicultural character.
- advance multiculturalism throughout Nigeria in harmony with the national Commitment to official languages of Nigeria (Gutierrez, Rosegrant Alvarez., Nemon, & Lewis, 1994:13-15).

The Bill also describes some measures for implementing the policy. The intention here was to meet the needs of major ethnic groups and their descendants in Nigeria not for the observation, or the introduction of the guiding principle of multiculturalism as were proposed by the Ijaws, Tivs or the Idomas who suffered for the early unity and development of Nigeria through the civil war. This was evidenced in the introduction of and practice of Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba cultures and their educational heritages (Ukoh, 2001). As diverse ethnic minority groups live and inter-marry with major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the essential thing would have been to integrate them fully in everything Nigeria is doing so that they can feel that they are part of Nigeria. Therefore, the policy of multiculturalism should include the combating of prejudice and discrimination, and the promotion of full and equal cultural and political life in Nigeria. Once this is done, justice and equality in all aspects of life in Nigeria would be emphasized. Basically, the policy of multiculturalism in Nigeria

poses two outcomes: the survival of ethnic origin groups and their cultures, along with the tolerance of this diversity and an absence of prejudice toward ethnic minorities (Dauda, 2008).

Multiculturalism as both a social and economic policy is historically identified with the liberal constructivist. Its purpose is to build a Nigerian state that will treat every member of the country equally irrespective of culture, gender etc. There were wide array of groups and subgroups in Nigeria with their cultural diversities long before the settlement of the British colonial masters. The country grew more diverse since the amalgamation of northern and southern protectorate, and has now become one of the most multicultural nations in the black race. One of the elements that made Nigeria a unique society is the significance it gives to its members as a happy and prayerful nation. According to Peter Newman, the policy of social mosaic or multiculturalism "remains the most single important national characteristic of every nation" and should be adhered to for its survival (Sanches, 1992:276).

As a term, multiculturalism has been used in a variety of ways. Andrew Heywood distinguished between two overall forms: descriptive and normative. Used descriptively, he said, "it has been taken to refer to cultural diversity", but as a normative term, it has been seen as "a positive endorsement, even celebration of communal diversity, typically based on either the right of different groups to respect and recognition or to the alleged benefits to the larger society of moral and cultural diversity (Ukor, 2011:12).

Newman argues that multiculturalism consists of a set of government activities that is aimed at promoting policies, programmes and practices that enhance the understanding of and respect for the delivery of the members of the state. To some people, multiculturalism in Nigeria is a framework for preserving Nigeria's unique cultural diversity, while to others, it is a subtle threat to people of ethnic minority, while to others it is a general lopsided policy designed to benefit the major ethnic groups. Chau (1991) has argues that by reinforcing stereotypes, multiculturalism reduces people to the lowest common denominator and as such, devalues and simplifies culture This critique sees multiculturalism as encouraging the devaluation of what it claims to protect and promote. The assertion here is that no group of people or culture should define the realities of another cultural group. This is true because all ethno-cultural groups are equal before humanity. The practice where major public institutions such as police, media and employment of labour, etc, are often under the guise of multiculturalism, monitor the activities of the visible minority and their ethnic groups with all intentions to label and marginalize them has been a thing of concern. Addressing this social stigma and discrimination will help to erase the fears of insensitivity' on the part of the major ethnic groups towards minority groups and also reduce the level of subjugation and deprivation on them in areas of employment, education, economic emancipation, political will and social services. This type of prejudice, racial and 'ethnic demonization' have triggered numerous fear and anger on the part of some communities and their leaders in Nigeria. It raised numerous questions in order to attract solution and actions concurrently. The issue then becomes, can the multicultural policy be implemented in such a way that it is beneficial to all members of Nigerian society despite the cultural and racial diversity? How can ethnic minorities be integrated into the mainstream of Nigerian society without discrimination and subjugation? This can only be known when the structures that constitute the discrimination and subjugations are known from their roots.

Structural Social Work Approach

In reality, traditional social work is not active in addressing issues of oppression that affect the people of ethnic minority in Nigeria. This is as a result of its reproduction of social order and the inability to sufficiently trace the antecedents of problems that are associated with oppression in Nigeria. The big question here is: how can we establish social change that will bring empowerment in the society. Jackson and Holvino (1988) stated that, because the basis of multiculturalism is social order, it does not recognize or provide any way of understanding the existing social disadvantage. The inequalities that are an intrinsic part of the multicultural policy have been shown to be of a structural nature; hence social work approaching the problems from a structural perspective is a viable alternative to working with the oppressed population in order to overcome

the structural inequalities and oppression among them. "Structural social work identifies the social environment as the source of social problems" and attributes them to the liberal notion of social disorganization (Mullaly, 1997: 104). Most of the developmental work on structural approach was done at Carlton University School of Social work under the leadership of the late professor Maurice Moreau. Two structural factors that give rise to many criticisms of the multicultural policy are ethnicity [race] and gender. Race, as a focus of multiculturalism, has already been dealt with extensively in many social work and sociological books. On the related concept of gender, Rice (1990) have pointed out a concern on the issue of gender and equality, namely that the onus is on the court to interpret the charter of rights that provide equal protection based on gender. Their question is whether a commitment to multiculturalism is compatible with women's equality rights when cultural practices are inconsistent with charter provisions for guaranteed equality? The fear is that the policy does not take into consideration that there are certain cultural practices that are oppressive to women, just as certain behaviours in Nigerian society is denigrating to some race. Failure to understand and address these contradictions constitutes collusion with patriarchal system, nepotism and marginalization. From a different perspective, Hanes (2000) has raised reservation about the ability of the policy to speak to the concerns of women of ethnic minorities, since, in focusing on culture, ethnic, racial, religious and linguistic groups, there is an overwhelming tendency for gender to be subsumed by group identity" (Hanes, 2002:83). This reflects the post-modernist/relative discourse, which stipulates that this kind of power should not be embodied in a policy as this subsumes differences under a universal banner. The assertion here is that no group should try to define the reality of another group. This is because all races are equal before God.

This was why Mullaly (1997) described the conceptual framework of structural social work as socialist ideology located within the radical social work camp, grounded in critical theory. It operates from a conflict view of society with emphasis on strong and powerful societal structures. In other words, structural social work sees individual problems from a specific societal context-liberal/neo-conservative capitalism rather than the individual's shortcomings. It also accentuates the following:

- (1) *The essence of socialist ideology, radical social work, critical theory, and the conflict perspective is that inequality is a natural, inherent, (structural) part of capitalism;*
- (2) *Falls along lines of class, gender, race, sexual orientation, age, ability, and geographical region;*
- (3) *Excludes these groups from opportunities, meaningful participation in society, and a satisfactory quality of life; and*
- (4) *Is self-perpetuating (Mullaly, 1997:133)."*

The use of structural social work approach in this discuss can be effective in consciousness-raising in order to enable ethnic minority groups to deconstruct the oppressive practices of the society; succinctly expressed how the interest in the stability of the social order necessitated the construction of multiculturalism" (Moreau & Lynne (1989:59). Structural Social Work can also assist oppressed populations to discover and reclaim their identity, create community solidarity and develop a group with united/shared voice in a community perspective (Mullaly, 1997). It is this form of empowerment that will motivate ethnic minority groups to gain certain amount of control over their environment and make life choices that will assist their communities in redefinition of multiculturalism.

Establishing Multicultural Community Organizing

Multicultural community organizing (MCO) refers to methods of practice that work toward the development of marginalized communities while creating mechanisms for greater inter-group interaction and change (Gutierrez, 1992). It is work that attempts to address the central challenge of living in a diverse society: How do we respect diversity and reduce inequality while working toward a common goal?

MCO is built on a pluralistic foundation, while going beyond pluralism to recognize and work to eliminate social injustices and oppression based on group membership (Gutierrez & Nagda, 1996; Jack-son & Holvion, 1988). Social work approaches to working with ethnic minorities can be located on a continuum, ranging from ethnocentric to ethno-conscious perspective. These approaches have differed in their perspectives regarding the culture and social status of these communities.

The ethnocentric perspective places the Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo traditions as the acceptable tradition of the Nigeria while excluding other traditions from the perspectives of the country. It is likely that the problem here is central hence the problems existing in visible communities are linked to non-recognition of their values or traditions (Chau, 1991; Gallegos, 1982; Gutierrez & Nagda, 1996; Morales, 1981). This perspective has been the dominant orientation for change in most of the social services agencies in Nigeria. It was also reflected in the development of the social services by predominantly upper-class men and women who created programmes that often-reflected classist, ethnicist, and nativist social mores (Wenocur & Reisch, 1989). Historically, ethnocentrism has manifested itself in the social services and employment through the provision of segregated services (Sanchez, 1995). Currently, our observations have shown that in Nigerian, the system seems to have been perfected in order to deny social services and political power to ethnic minorities. In order to address these problems, social workers in the communities should bring them together and lead them to change through the development of ethnic sensitive and culturally competent approaches to practice (Gallegos, 1982; Scott & Delgado, 1979). This movement has led to the development of programmes and organizations that will be more responsive and responsible to the culture of people of ethnic minority. For example, the language, location and methods used are developed with the needs and values of cultures in the community as the focus. It is believed that pluralistic vision of social work will bring change in this perspective. This therefore suggests that positive gains can result from learning about different cultural groups and incorporating cultural values into organizational procedures, structures, and services (Devore & Schlesinger, 1987; Gallegos, 1982; Green, 1995). The ethnic sensitive approach is an inadequate response to the disenfranchisement and inequality experienced by marginalized communities. By focusing on individual change and cultural factors, it ignores the role of power in social order and in social work practice (McMahon & Allen-Meares, 1992). In addition, by focusing solely on cultural factors, these approaches may not recognize the diversity that exists within ethnic and local groups and may serve to reinforce stereotypes. Research suggests that if ethnic sensitive service does not lead to structural changes in organizations and a greater participation of groups that felt marginalized in the governance of the agency, efforts toward change must be symbolic and marginal (Gutierrez & Nagda, 1996). This is true because the ethnic minority has no good image in Nigeria economically, socially and politically due to marginalization. This can be addressed by involving various ethnic groups in Nigeria into the mainstream of economic and political affairs of the Nigerian state. Their participation will erase their cry of isolation, intimidation and marginalization.

The ethno-conscious approach, which combines an ethnic sensitive orientation and an empowerment perspective in practice, holds promise for creating services, programmes, and organizations that will work to reduce inequality. The ethno-conscious approach is based on an appreciation and recognition of the strengths existing in minority ethnic groups (Mullaly, 2007). At its centre is a concern with power and confronting social inequality through work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. It involves methods for partnership, participation, and capacity building. In all work, people of ethnic minority are active agents as individuals and in social change.

Like other methods of social work practice, community organizing can take place at any point. For example, an ethnocentric community organizing perspective would locate difficulties with organizations within the community itself and with the predominant culture of the community, rather than looking at structural barriers to participation or ways in which cultural traditions could be used to mobilize for change. An ethnic sensitive perspective would utilize cultural traditions but would not focus on social justice or inequality. Although this approach could be successful in reaching or mobilizing a specific ethnic community, it would not address larger issues of inequality and injustice.

Ethno-conscious practice through MCO can begin to address the challenges of the 21st century by creating social environments that support social justice that influences policies and programme development in the community. Although the target of change is community or larger society, the forum for change will involve individuals, families, groups or organizations (Elden, 2016; Mullaly, 2002; Burghardt, 1982). Specific tactics reflect current community practice and can range from short and focused activities such as public hearings to long and sustained projects such as the development of alternative services (Carniol, 2005).

MCO is based on our understanding of empowerment: ways in which social workers can work with individuals, families, groups, and communities to help them to become more powerful (Gutierrez & Nurius, 1994). Gaining power would involve developing the means to have influence over one's life and social environment on the personal, interpersonal, or political levels (Gutierrez, 1994, Hick, 2002). It involves both changes in one's self-perception and in the ability to act in the social world. This perspective on power and empowerment is centered on understanding how individuals develop a sense of personal control and the ability to effect the behavior of others and on an understanding that power is not necessarily a scarce commodity but one that can be generated in the process of empowerment (Gutierrez, 1994; Rappaport, 1987. Research Suggests that the process of empowerment can take place when practice methods are focused on education, participation, and capacity building (Parsons, 1991). It suggests a Role for the organizer as catalyst or facilitator of change rather than leader or educator. If MCO is to contribute to the empowerment of ethnic minorities, it needs to use these methods to develop organizing strategies.

Educational Approach:

This method's intention is to help participants develop the ability to understand and act upon their social environment. The focus of this method is to understand one situation, the community, and to develop skills, which will increase one's interpersonal relationship and to form a viable, valuable and consensual community development that is culturally rich in political power. With this method, the community skills will be harnessed and integrated to the benefit of the members of the community. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*" (Freire, 1973); explains how the traditional model of education is an instrument of oppression and serves to reinforce social inequalities (Parsons, 1991). The type of education we are proposing here should not be oppressive. It should be embedded in the model of empowerment; consciousness-raising that will involve both individual and social empowerment.

Consciousness-raising can take place in groups in which members share their common histories through discussion and other educational channels. The process of consciousness-raising is important because it helps individuals, families, and communities understand the nature of their problems and address them critically. The understanding can also clarify possible responses or solutions to difficult situations (Freire, 1973). These difficult situations are in most cases inherited community problems or institutional structured problems like racial discrimination and poverty that have affected every individual members of the community in one way or the other. This is because they have no adequate knowledge of how to tackle or solve the problems effectively. It is only when they are conscientised that they will seek support on how to address or solve the problems.

An effective power analysis is one element of consciousness-raising. This exercise involves identifying one's own success of power and methods for increasing power resources (Burghardt, 1982). It requires that organizers fully comprehend the connection between the immediate situation and the distribution of power in society as a whole and see the potential for power and influence in every situation. Sources of potential power can include such things as individual skills, personal qualities that could increase social influence, members of past social support networks, and other organizations in and outside he community, which have similar and interfacing cultural relationships.

Education also involves developing specific skills to address power deficits and to develop the resources that will make one more powerful (Mondros & Wilson, 1994). These skills can include formal training on information such as tenant's rights or on skills such as conflict resolution. When teachings these skills, the organizer should operate as a consultant or facilitator rather than instructor, so as not to replace the power relationships that the worker and client are attempting to overcome (Sherman & Wenocur, 1983; Solomon, 1976).

Participatory/involvement approach:

This requires collaborative effort with the community members. It involves recognizing and sharing one's own power in order to develop the power of others. For instance, within a community development organization, organizers could take the role of consultant and facilitator, working with members of

community-based agencies in order to help them design, develop, and run their own educational programmes. When doing this work, we must perceive ourselves as enablers, organizers, consultants, or compatriots of the community in an effort to avoid replicating the powerlessness the community experienced with other helpers or professionals. It presumes that we do not hold the answers to problems, but, in the context of collaboration, community members will develop the insights, skills, and capacity to resolve the community's problem in their own cultural, economic and political environment (Solomon, 1996).

The interaction here would be motivated by the influence the organizer has which should be equated with the trust, and respect he/she commands in the community. The skills, knowledge and attitude that will be used here must be embedded in the culture of the people. If the organizer is the member of the community, then primary contact is appropriate to do first. Primary contact involves intimate and personal grassroots work with the community. In contrast, an organizer who is of a similar ethnic or racial background but not of the community would be involved at the secondary level. This level would involve participation as a liaison link- person between the community and the larger society.

The tertiary level of contact would be most appropriate for those who are not members of group on any dimension. They can provide valuable contributions to the community through consultation and the sharing of technical knowledge. Therefore, awareness of one's own similarity to and difference from a community is crucial for defining work roles and understanding how one might be seen by others (Rivera & Erlich, 1995).

Awareness is usually made possible through community development organizations and community/village leaders. Community development organizations are usually organized groups that seek to make fundamental change in their community through community participation and leadership. Here, community members are active participants in the governance of the organization, in the staffing of projects, and in planning process. In this perspective, communities have considerable power regarding the methods and goals of organizing. Participation suggests ways in which community members are involved in governance of the organizing effort. This can range from collaboration in analyzing community conditions to representation on the board of directors. The degree to which participation translates into actual power over the organizing effort will determine the level of empowerment. An equal critical aspect of participation is the process of praxis. If active involvement is to contribute to empowerment, participants should be encouraged to reflect upon and analyze their experience. The results of this analysis can then be integrated into the development of future efforts (Burghardt, 1982; Freire, 1973; Fook, 1993).

Capacity Building and Skill Recognition

Capacity building refers to the methods that build from individual and community strengths rather than on working to correct problems or difficulties. Building from strengths often means recognizing and validating skills and capacities that may often go unnoticed and un-rewarded. It is crucial to recognize that many communities have been involved in a process of struggle against oppressive structures that required considerable strengths which can be more easily identified, communicated, and used as a basis for future work.

This ordinarily requires recognizing community leaders who have worked to improve conditions within their communities through the involvement of community networks (Ackelsberg & Diamond, 1987). For example, movements for equality and civil rights within communities of colour in North America during the mid and late 20th century built upon existing relations within churches, voluntary organizations, and workplace (Evans 1980; Munoz, 1989, West, 1990). In urban communities today especially in Canada, grassroots organizations continue to use these informal networks to work on issues such as education, housing, safety, and immigration reform (Rivers & Erlich, 1995). In most cases, visible minority community organizations are made to build coalitions with predominant white civil rights organizations in order to push home their demands to the government and the society. When this coalition is cemented in the name of liberation and restoration of human rights, white majority in the human rights organizations often spearheads the protest. It is based on this that the distinctiveness of the community (multicultural community) as a new territory of emotional relations through the dynamics of the coalition can best be understood (Hough & Briskman, 2003).

The discussions and the examples used in the paper have focused primarily on how MCO methods can be used within ethnic minority communities. This is not to imply that the development of methods for cross-cultural or multiethnic coalitions is not also the focus of this practice (Rivers & Erlich, 1995). Instead, the development of unity in diversity arises from a critical understanding and application of the processes discussed here. Only by building effective and viable organizations within ethnic minorities and their communities can coalitions that unite communities around common issues be developed. By understanding one's own place and one's own community, individuals can begin to reach out and work with others. Participating in programmes within an organization can be educational and can build on strength. When participants and communities are not seen as competent, they will not be treated as equal partners. A focus on education can guide the ways in which strengths are developed and participation is structured. Therefore, multicultural community organizing methods comprise a holistic approach to community development practice.

Challenges in Multicultural Community Organizing

Multicultural community organizing like all community work is challenging and difficult. It involves diving into those conflicts that exist in our society and being able to take a stand on controversial issues. In order to do this work, organizers require supportive supervision, education, and leadership (Gutierrez, Glen-May, & Delois, 1995). The education here should be multicultural so that the marginalized and those who perpetuate marginalization can understand the language and the yearning of the marginalized. This would help to draw more support from those who are ignorant of the condition of the marginalized people especially the visible minority and the disabled. When this work is successful, it can be particularly gratifying and rewarding for the organizer and community at large.

However, we would like to outline some of the challenges to be met if social workers are to engage in effective multicultural community work. Multicultural community organizing requires that the organizers should be skillful in all aspects of community work. Rather than working from one framework of practice, the focus should be on how to mix and face different approaches to community organizing according to the wishes of the community with its needs and strengths, and the resources available (Weinberg, 2006; Wood & Tully, 2006). It is important to note here that the ability to learn from the community is important as the community participates in its own project. This will help to touch the lives of the members of the community and the society. This involves self-awareness regarding one's own understanding of the community, finding ways to learn more about the local community that brought key informants, working as partners to develop local leadership, and focusing on ways to build cohesiveness within and outside ethnic communities in order to understand and facilitate change (Green, 1995).

The critical role of the organizer is that of a learner who approaches the community with interest to organize them. In this case, the multicultural communities must be articulated by the community organizer, and tailored under four-level strategy requiring work within and between different communities. The four levels have the following foci:

- identifying issues within specific communities;
- Motivating behavioural change in individuals that engage in high-risk behavior;
- Organizing individuals within communities;
- Mobilizing community-based organizations and public/private institutions to work together in order to break down barriers to health care.

This form of public/private partnership requires the involvement of the entire community. Such processes of becoming familiar with individual clients/communities, getting to know their histories and responding to their preferences, also require considerable time and skill (Pease, 2003). For example, in Markurdi, the escalation of HIV/AIDS among sex workers has amounted to the involvement of all stakeholders in healthcare in order to make the sex hawkers and their communities to be aware of the devastating effect of the dreaded disease. The concerned groups here made it possible to bring all ethnic groups to know that HIV/AIDS has no boundary in terms of ethnic group, gender or sexual orientation.

It is only when community groups work in solidarity with their communities through the provision of education and support for AIDS/HIV prevention and to bring communities together to advocate for larger systems of support that this change can be made. Building strong cultural organization is relevant here. This will help to build organized efforts within specific ethnic and racial communities. The approach has been seen as providing a base for engaging other communities to help in tackling problems (like HIV/AIDS). Multicultural community organizing calls for understanding the significance of social location in shaping human experience (Green 1995). This includes valuing of one's own class, gender, and cultural heritage and having respect for and interest in the heritage of others (Green, 1995). By realizing where one is situated and what values and world views one holds make the dynamics of inter-group relationships become more apparent. Without seeing one's position, it is impossible to really grasp the position of others (Green, 1995).

Gaining knowledge of the history, traditions, and values of other groups is also essential. This is important since ethnicity is formed from historical and social influences, learning about these external and internal factors helps to understand the problems and strengths of different communities. Respect for others means that one not only acknowledge the importance of others' culture but takes an interest in gaining knowledge about the differences. Through ethnic competence, multicultural community organizers can cultivate respect for diversity among the different groups in order to facilitate cooperation and break down the barriers between cultures. They must also be able to use this knowledge effectively so that the potentials of each group can be maximized through coordinated efforts with other groups.

Multicultural community organizers must act as both facilitators and learners in every aspect of their functions. The listening skill and democratic principles should be placed as priority on their agenda as a panacea for the growth of the community and its fellowship. The process of empowerment requires that individuals and groups should develop their own strengths and solutions. Through a facilitative approach, the multicultural community organizers can foster positive collaborations. In order to do this, an effective facilitator channel must be open to others while recognizing their limitations. Through this cooperative interaction between the organizer and the community, consciousness is raised and solutions are generated (Rivera & Erlich, 1995).

Recognizing and working with inter and intra-group conflict is for MCO. It requires breaking down existing social boundaries to build alliances to recognize and embrace the conflict that characterizes cross-cultural work. Conflict arises both within organizations that have been successful in reaching a diverse group and between the organization and a larger community that may be threatened by these multiracial and ethnic coalitions. In some respects, the emergence of conflict indicates that meaningful multicultural work is taking place. However, the sources and resolution of conflict will affect the outcomes. The extent to which the organizer can anticipate and use conflict constructively determines whether the efforts are successful (Salawu, 2010).

Work on MCO is currently limited by a lack of systematic research to evaluate its methods (O' Connor, 1995). The field of research on evaluating community organization methods has focused primarily on effectiveness on changing individual-level outcomes such as health behaviours, educational attainment, or employment (O'Connor, 1995). Research on community practice has been primarily descriptive, focusing on describing methods for practice or forms of participation (Carniol, 2005). Only recently has research begun to look specifically at the effectiveness of methods of engaging citizens in community institutions and conflict resolutions (Gutierrez, & Nurius, 1994).). If we are to understand methods of MCO and their ability to improve community life, the research that is needed here should be the type that would look specifically at ways in which MCO can be made effective.

The brief discussion of the challenges of MCO suggests that barriers to engage in this form of practice are intimidating. It requires consistent and appropriate education and support, a focus on the intra- and interpersonal aspects of community practice, skills in conflict management, and understanding of how difference and inequality affect interpersonal and community practice and research in social work.

Conclusion

Someone may ask: in what ways can MCO influence the trends identified at the beginning of this paper? The demographic changes in Nigerian society will proceed regardless of how social workers respond. We (social workers) currently face a choice between working for social justice and equality in an increasingly diverse world or working to reinforce current calls for social control. Will the role of social work be focused on using ethnic sensitive community education approaches to encourage the construction of larger and stronger persons or to develop multicultural methods that will question the use of persons and solve problems of economic dislocation (Dressel, 1994)? The path we take will be affected by the direction of our professional mission as well as by our ability to engage in multicultural community organizing within our profession and our community.

In order for social work to contribute to empower ethnic minority communities, we need to recognize our roles within the society and identify ways in which we can work more effectively as allies to the communities that we serve (Frumkin & O'Conner, 1985; Reisch & Wenocur, 1986). Social workers in this case must be aware of local power elite, the owners of the factories, business, the housing, and the land and those who hold political power at the Federal, state and local government levels.

Community organizations such as church groups, social clubs, school committees, recreation groups, merchants associations, age groups and ethnic associations are also part of the formal and informal structures of local power, and should be studied carefully and be included in the community reconciliation and organizing. Power is important in relations between an organizer and the population. Social workers should abandon the myth of the superiority of professional knowledge and accept the people as active partners in their process of learning about the community. As social workers, we need to maintain a positive focus both on the strengths and possibilities that exist in our world and our own strengths and possibilities as a profession. Reaching the objectives of multicultural community organizing will require a social transformation towards the development of equitable and just inter- group relationships. In this process, diversity must be understood, respected, and utilized while unity must be forged. Through unity in diversity and social change, multicultural community organizers can be instrumental in promoting greater equity.

We have tried to highlight basic issues involved in the definition, practice and implementation of MCO using structural social work framework as a good explanation in relation with Multicultural Community Organizing as an approach. If social workers are to engage in MCO, we need to recognize and act upon multiple dimensions of social work education, research and practice. Without these changes in the structure of social work and the education of practitioners, effective MCO will not take place. The 21st century social work practice must take a critical look at our roles and missions and find ways to work together with our colleagues, clients, and communities especially the marginalized and discriminated groups in our society so that we can create a qualitative and equitable society. It is our view that social work community practice should continue to be presence in Nigerian public life, fluctuating overtime and certainly taking different form in 21st century. This will help us to address some social issues confronting our profession. It can be understood nowadays that community work as in social work specialization has undergone a significance decline.

A review of current social work periodicals and curriculum offerings at Schools of Social Work would help to establish the presence of community planning through community organizing as a subject (Reisch & Wenocur, 1986). With this in place, there are still opportunities for social workers as political action workers to help and restore dignity and hope of people they are working with, especially, those with enormous constituencies of low-income, especially women, unemployed, physically challenged, the discriminated and the culturally and economically marginalized groups. Our profession has much work to do in order to prepare us to defend and embody our principles and ethics as we continue with the 21st century community organizing. Social workers must develop new community integration techniques as well as new strategies for community organizing. Our work with marginalized clients and communities compels us to bridge the gap between individual and community oriented social work practice so that our accumulated wisdom can come to bear as we struggle to serve this population adequately.

Finally, before closing, we would like to state that our profession now needs to be more proactive in coming up with designed programmes and proposals that will meet the needs and aspirations of the marginalized communities and individuals. It is our professional obligation to defend these groups irrespective of what the oppressor may say or do to tarnish our image at the point of our professional practice.

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