

Community Participation and Empowerment in Promoting Healthy Communities

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Citation: Obot, V.O., Afia, U.U., Johnson, N.I. (2022) Community Participation and Empowerment in Promoting Healthy Communities, *International Journal of Public Health, Pharmacy and Pharmacology*, Vol. 7, No.4, pp.15-30

ABSTRACT: *Community participation and empowerment could be imperative in achieving healthy communities if properly utilized and implemented. A community is a configuration of individuals, families, and groups whose values, characteristics, interests, geography, or social relations unite them in some way and the word is used to denote both the people living in a place, and the place itself. Community participation and empowerment are community-based actions, policies or programs that are driven by community members which can affect local factors that can influence health, and has the potential to promote healthy communities. This paper on community participation and empowerment in promoting healthy communities discussed concepts such as community participation and empowerment, healthy community, importance of community participation and empowerment, the need for community participation and empowerment, roles of community participation and empowerment on healthy communities, partnerships for healthy communities, components of a healthy community and benefits of healthy communities.*

KEY WORDS: Community, participation, empowerment, healthy community

INTRODUCTION

Participation is a rich concept that varies with its application and definition. The way participation is defined also depends on the context in which it occurs. For some, it is a matter of principle; for others, practice; for still others, an end in itself (Taras et al., 2015). Often, the term participation is modified with adjectives, resulting in terms such as community participation, citizen participation, people's participation, public participation, and popular participation. Participation involves having a share in or to taking part in, thereby emphasizing the rights of individuals and the choices that they make in order to participate. Arnstein (2019) states that the idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach, that is, no one is against it in principle because it is good for you. But there has been little analysis of the content of citizen participation, its definition, and its relationship to social imperatives such as social structure, social interaction, and the social context where it takes place.

Rubin and Rubin (2014) defined participation as a means to educate citizens and to increase their competence. It is a vehicle for influencing decisions that affect the lives of citizens and an avenue for transferring political power. However, it can also be a method to co-opt dissent, a mechanism for ensuring the receptivity, sensitivity, and even accountability of social services to the consumers. Citizen participation is a process by which citizens act in response to public

concerns, voice their opinions about decisions that affect them, and take responsibility for changes to their community.

Bloom et al. (2019) suggest that citizen participation may also be a response to the traditional sense of powerlessness felt by the general public when it comes to influencing government decisions; people often feel that health and social services are beyond their control because the decisions are made outside their community by unknown bureaucrats and technocrats. Participation is a collective effort to increase and exercise control over resources and institutions on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from control. This definition points toward a mechanism for ensuring community participation. Participation as a process through which stakeholder's influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them. A descriptive definition of participation programs would imply the involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions that enhance their well-being, for example, their income, security or self-esteem (Akintobi et al., 2012).

Community participation requires involvement of community members in projects that address their issues. Meaningful community participation extends beyond physical involvement to include generation of ideas, contributions to decision making, and sharing of responsibility. Among the factors that motivate people to participate are the desire to play an active role in bettering their own lives, fulfilling social or religious obligations, feeling a need for a sense of community, and wanting cash or in-kind rewards. Whatever people's motivations, obtaining meaningful community participation and having a successful, sustained initiative require that engagement leaders respect, listen to, and learn from community members. An absence of mutual respect and co-learning can result in a loss of time, trust, resources, and, most importantly, effectiveness (Bretty, 2013).

The social exchange perspective provides insight into motivations for participation; it uses the framework of benefits and costs to help explain who participates and why. From this perspective, organizations and individuals are involved in an exchange system and voluntarily share resources to meet their goals (Bretty, 2013). Community members and organizations will participate if they perceive that the benefits of participation outweigh the effort required. The potential benefits of participation for community members, academics, and health professionals include opportunities for networking, access to information and resources, personal recognition, learning, a sense of helping to solve community problems, improved relationships among stakeholders, increased capacity for problem solving and contact with hard-to-reach populations. Empowerment is a group-based participatory, developmental process through which marginalized or oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environment, acquire valued resources and basic rights, and achieve important life goals and reduced societal marginalization. Ideally, empowerment is both a process and an outcome of community participation.

Empowerment takes place at three levels; the individual, the organization or group, and the community. Empowerment at one level can influence empowerment at the other levels. Furthermore, empowerment is multidimensional, taking place in sociological, psychological, economic, political and other dimensions (Fawcett et al., 2015). Community empowerment

involves professional relationships to communities, emphasizing partnership and collaboration rather than a top-down approach (Wallerstein, 2012). Empowerment theory stresses that no external entity should assume that it can bestow on a community the power to act in its own self-interest. Rather, those working to engage the community should, when appropriate, offer tools and resources to help the community act in its own interest. This could include helping to channel existing sources of community power in new ways to act on the determinants of various programmes. Communities are usually assessed in terms of their problems, but they point out that this demeans and disempowers the community, relegating its members to the roles of dependents and recipients of services. Communities are assessed in terms of their own assets, resources and resourcefulness.

Community empowerment deals with building capacity to improve development of sustainable skills, resources and organizational structures in the affected community. For empowerment efforts to be equitable, effective and sustainable, all stakeholders must be ready for collaboration and leadership. Thus, building capacity also includes fostering shared knowledge, leadership skills, and an ability to represent the interests of one's constituents. Because community empowerment is deeply rooted in the social, political, and economic environment, it cannot be conducted without an understanding of the specific environment in which it will take place. When carried out with context in mind, community empowerment is an integral part of community organization efforts, necessary for challenging power imbalances and effectively addressing problems.

Community Participation and Empowerment

Drawing from Dale (2014), perspective on participation in development work, may also be captured by juxtaposing two notions, participation as contribution and as empowerment. Participation as contribution may be enlisted primarily in the implementation of programmes and projects or in the operation and maintenance of created facilities. The contribution may be entirely voluntary, induced to various extents or even enforced. It may be provided in the form of ideas, judgments, money, materials, or unpaid or lowly paid labour (Dale, 2014). Indeed, this notion may also see participation as means to get things done. According to Bretty (2013), participation is an empowering process in which people, in partnership with each other and those able to assist them, identify problems and needs, mobilize resources, and assume responsibility to plan, manage, control and assess the individual and collective actions that they themselves decide upon. As a process of empowerment, participation is concerned with development of skills and abilities to enable the rural people to manage better have a say in or negotiate with existing development systems (Madu, 2017).

As Eade and Rowlands (2013) argue, powerlessness is a central element of poverty, and any focus on poverty, inequality, injustice, or exclusion involves analysis of and/or challenging/changing power and power relations. Participation as empowerment can therefore help to amplify unacknowledged voices by enabling the rural people to decide upon and take the actions which they believe are essential to their development. According to some Eade and Rowlands (2013), studies, small informal groups consisting of members from similar socio-economic backgrounds are better vehicles for participation in decision making and collective learning than heterogeneous, large scale and more formal organizations.

Community participation and empowerment are seen as fundamental for achieving equitable, people-centred programmes including health care. It is widely acknowledged that community participation can play a significant role in promoting health, education and other aspect of life. Community involvement in participation and empowerment is important for many reasons. It aids in the ability to identify local issues and to develop strategies to resolve barriers that impede access and retention and compromise quality. Participation in the life of a community's activities also helps to ensure the relevance of what is given to them. It can also be an effective component in monitoring the process and outcomes of programmes at multiple levels. In resource-constrained settings community participation can also serve as an effective means of advocating for and mobilising the resources needed to move towards a high-quality public system of education, health, among others in a community.

Community participation and empowerment also has the potential to increase awareness levels and to bring about improvements in health and living conditions. This has resulted in many efforts to bring community and school closer together as also to involve community members in the development of programmes. Community participation and empowerment covers a range of important issues including how community participation works in an environment characterized by deep-rooted socio-economic divisions; the equitable distribution of participation; identifying and defining the community; and ensuring the genuine representation of those who are traditionally excluded from decision-making in rural areas (Caldwell et al., 2015). It is aimed to explore how key stakeholders, example, teachers, parents and government officials, define community participation.

Healthy Community

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief or economic and social condition (WHO, 2014). Prerequisites for health include peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable eco-system, sustainable resources and social justice and equity. As such, a healthy community continually creates and improves the environment and expands resources such that the prerequisites for health are provided and all citizens of the community move toward the broad definition of health.

The health status of a community is dependent upon the environment within which those individuals live. A person's health is a product of their environment. As such, a healthy community is one in which all residents have access to a quality education, safe and healthy homes, adequate employment, transportation, physical activity, and nutrition, in addition to quality health care. Unhealthy communities lead to chronic disease, such as cancers, diabetes, and heart disease. The health of our communities is critical to the growth and development of our region. To build a healthy community, members must develop multi-sectoral collaborations between community members and stakeholders to ensure the sustainability and adequacy of resources to support comprehensive reform. A healthy community does not exist solely based on the quality of its healthcare system, but rather based on a range of social and economic resources needed for the health and well-being of its members in all aspects of their lives.

Importance of Community Participation and Empowerment

Some importance of community participation and empowerment are highlighted below:

Self-Reliance and Self Help

During the development decade of the 1960s, self- reliance and self- help projects became the order of the day (Putnam, 2013). Putnam (2013) also notes that this trend is further developed by the social worker. The main components of this developmental process are participation in taking initiatives to identify unmet needs, and self- reliance, breaking away from dependencies that suppress the creativity of the poor. This approach is nearest to the type of people's participation practice in Nigeria. It is more a psychological than an economic or physical process.

Identification of Suitable Stakeholders

The public involvement of stakeholders in development projects is widely recognized as a fundamental element of the process. Timely, well-planned and well-implemented public involvement programmes have contributed to the successful design, implementation, operation and management of proposals (Eade and Rowlands, 2013). For instance, the range of stakeholders involved in an Environmental Impact Assessment project typically includes the people, individuals, or groups in the local community, the proponent and other project beneficiaries, Government agencies, Non-governmental Organizations and others, such as donors, the private sectors, academics, and so forth.

Needs Identification and Goal Determination

Participation of the masses in development activities implies enhanced capacity to perceive their own needs. Through participation, local people identify their needs as well as the relevant goals of a program. By participating in decision making and implementation activities, local people help project officials identify needs, strategies to meet those needs, and the necessary resources required to implement the various strategies (Madu, 2017). For example, community participation and empowerment will be discouraged if environmental issues are given priority in agendas without addressing issues such as poverty, homelessness, health and other basic necessities perceived to be more important by the rural communities.

Information Dissemination

This is the flow of information from the proponent of the development project to the public. The proponent should provide sufficient relevant information about the project such as the benefits of the project to the beneficiaries, the costs of implementation, the potential for financing, implementation, and possible risk factors. The proponent must allow sufficient time for individuals to read and discuss information provided, and listen to the views held by individuals as well as to issues and problems. The Lack of transparency often fosters mistrust and misunderstanding between project authorities and local communities.

Consultation

Consultation involves inviting people's views on the proposed actions and engaging them in a dialogue. It is a two- way flow of information between the proponent and the public. Consultation provides opportunities for the public to express their views on the project proposal initiated by the project proponent. Rigorous planning and implementation of projects should

be undertaken only after considerable discussion and consultation. Consultation includes education, information sharing, and negotiation, with the goal being a better decision making process through organizations consulting the general public (Bretty, 2013). This process allows neglected people to hear and have a voice in future undertakings.

Genuine Interests

Participation depends on people's legitimate interests in the project or development activities. Therefore, participation needs to be considered as an active process, meaning that the person or group in question takes initiatives and asserts an independent role.

Involvement of Public in Decision Making

Public involvement should entail the encouragement of a maximum number of people in the participation of development projects. Such involvement should give the participants full inclusion in designing, organizing, and implementing activities and workshops in order to create consensus, ownership, and action in support of environmental change in specific areas. It should include people and groups rather than exclude any individuals. Public involvement is a process involving the public in the decision making of an organization (Bretty, 2013). Participation actually brings the public into the decision-making process.

Accountability

The requirement of accountability applies to all parties involved in a project, such as project management, external organizers, and traditional leaders, as well as any emergent leadership from the ranks of the poor and the disadvantaged. The authors also note that agencies involved in a project management and implementations are procedurally and periodically answerable to the people in the project area, as well as the citizens of the country in general. All people should be aware of their roles in a project and the planning of activities of the project. Accountability of concerned community members must be ensured, particularly after the decision is taken.

Frequent Interaction

Often there is interaction at the beginning of the project but no dialogue or any other form of interaction occurs during the project. This ultimately creates a big gap between the proponents of the development projects and the communities. Consequently, the local people abandon a project based on such an idea. Therefore, it is suggested that there should be ongoing communication throughout the project period.

Ownership and Control

Participation plays a major role in people's management of their own affairs. Ownership and control of resources have a profound impact on participation in development projects. Bloom et al (2019) emphasized four areas to be worked toward in a participatory coastal resource management program, which includes greater economic and social equality, better access to services for all, greater participation in decision making, and deeper involvement in the organizing process resulting from the empowerment of people.

Sharing of Benefits

It is evident that without sharing the benefits of a project, participation is a frustrating process for the poorer people. There should be a fair and equitable distribution of benefits, as well as

redistribution of goods and services, to enable poorer people to get a fairer share of society's wealth and to participate fully in the development process. Bloom et al. (2019) mention that participation entails three distinct processes, firstly, the involvement of the people in decision making; secondly, eliciting of their contribution to development programs; and thirdly, their participation in sharing the benefits from the development process.

Partnership

Partnership in development processes allows concern stakeholders to work, talk, and solve problems with individuals who are often perceived as the masters. Dale (2014) identified a set of principles for collaboration in a variety of situations. These include nonintrusive collaboration, mutual trust and respect, a common analysis of what the problem is a commitment to solidarity, equality in the relationship, an explicit focus on process, and the importance of language.

The Need for Community Participation and Empowerment

In order to ameliorate social, economic and environmental problems that seriously confront communities, which have a negative impact, it is imperative for community members to form organizations, participate fully in community activities and empower themselves in developmental activities so as to succeed in contributing to long term sustainable socio-economic development, local community integration is required to assist in. In this regard, the success of community participation in development should not be measured merely in terms of increased numbers of people that participated, but should also be evaluated according to how the participation will benefits local communities at a grassroots level. In this regard, government policy and grassroots programmes should be strengthened and should involve the input of local communities (the beneficiaries).

To encourage effective and efficient community participation that will enhance community development in both rural and urban areas, government should create the enabling environment for all rural communities.

Policy and institutional mechanisms should be established to encourage local participation in the design, implementation and management of community developmental projects and local use of resources. At least, local communities should be empowered to determine what forms of development they want and how they can develop their respective communities, and how development costs and benefits should be shared among different stakeholders. In order to achieve these, there should bottom-up approach to development.

There should be campaigns, mass communication or media and jingles in enlightening Nigerians on active community participation and its benefits. Suggestion also goes to the various NGOs whose mandate is to spur development in the country to come out with development programmes and policies to enhance the effort of the government in reducing developmental challenges in rural and urban communities.

Social factors like poverty, ignorance, unemployment, inequality, illiteracy should be confronted by government. These factors hinder the people not to participate in community development. Economic empowerment creates good atmosphere for community participation which in turn encourage community development.

Community-based organisations in development that will see residents in rural communities actively participating in the decision making process on activities that are related to community participation and development should be established. Community based organisations should use an interactive participation approach where people, including local communities, will participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions. Local community should regard participation here as a right, not merely as a means to achieve project goals. Community should also recognise that through this process local groups take control over local decisions and determine how local resources should be used, so that they have a stake in maintaining structures and practices.

In order for community-based development organisations to materialise in rural areas, local communities should develop a pool of resources, including financial support, human capital, and ownership of development projects. Local people should be actively involved in each and every stage of development planning in order to ensure that all their projects are well integrated to serve community interest.

Rural people should be engaged and should be involved in development programmes in their villages or community right from the start. This process will present a significant step towards ensuring more adequate participation in development. However, considering the fact that there is a lack of skills within local communities to make decisions independently, Government at all level should develop a strategy that will see more local skills strengthened. This means that for some time local people will only participate through consultation until necessary skills are produced within the local communities so that interactive participation, which was suggested above can be fully implemented.

Roles of Community Participation and Empowerment in Fostering Healthy Communities

Community is any configuration of individuals, families, and groups whose values, characteristics, interests, geography or social relations unite them in some way. However, the word is used to denote both the people living in a place, and the place itself.. Therefore, a community-based solution is an action, policy, program, or law that is driven by the community (members), affects local factors that can influence health, and has the potential to promote healthy living. The potential of community participation and empowerment to advance health equity is a focus because solutions to health issues could be identified, developed and implemented at the community level. Hence, community-based solutions represent important strategy to promote health equity. Communities exist in a milieu of national, state and local level policies, forces, and programs that enable and support or interfere with and impede the ability of community residents and their partners to address the conditions that lead to health inequity. Therefore, the power of community participation and empowerment are necessary and essential in promoting a healthy community.

In addition to the support of high level policies, such as those that address structural inequities like residential segregation, community participation and empowerment also rely on multi-sectoral and multilevel collaborations and approaches: for example, engaging business and other non-traditional partners. Community participation and empowerment are strengths of multi-sectoral collaboration and efforts that are not primarily health focused that they, by definition, ensure diverse approaches to improving healthy community. Such diverse

approaches also are a manifestation of the fact that not all communities start out observing the unfair differences in life expectancy between one side of town and another and thereafter seek to address those inequities. Communities believe that improving health among their residents is important, and whether health is the end or the means to an end, communities can benefit by understanding how health is connected to other goals important to them, and improving education, housing, or employment can also help improve health and mitigate health inequity. A community serves as the bedrock of health, a foundation for achieving other important goals, and key to building a productive society. Communities differ in the causes of health inequity they experience, from the availability of health care providers, the affordability and quality of housing, and employment opportunities, to schools, transportation systems, safety, the availability of parks and green space, and other aspects of the physical environment. Some of the challenges faced by vulnerable communities are unique, while others may be common among multiple communities and populations, or they may be present in every community.

Not only is each community unique in the degree and nature of its health inequities, but so too are the means to address those issues, in terms of such resources as locus of power and community values. What communities share, however, is that they are each experts on their local needs and assets and thus need to drive community-based solutions to health issues through Community participation and empowerment. Community participation and empowerment could help directly address the determinants of health in order to improve health inequities. In each case, community participation and empowerment are supported, enabled, or facilitated by federal or state policies and programs because, community action is a necessary, but not sufficient, contributor to achieving healthy status for the citizens. Communities exist in a milieu of public- and private-sector policies, forces, and programs that enable and support or interfere with and impede the ability of community residents and their partners to address the conditions that lead to a healthy community. Community participation and empowerment requires a supportive context, which may range from government policies and programs to the activities of an anchor institution such as higher institutions or businesses.

Community participation and empowerment help many communities strive to achieve greater well being and healthy living. Whether health is a community's ultimate goal or the means to an end, communities can benefit by pursuing health equity through community participation and empowerment. Examining health outcomes in the community can help communities understand how health is connected to other desired objectives, and improving education or housing or employment can also help improve health. Communities can see the potential for win-wins. Although it is possible that some communities will notice health disparities and target them as a priority, that is not always the case. When it is not, it may be helpful to encourage communities to consider health equity as a potential co-benefit and to open up additional avenues for measurement, evaluation, and planning. For example, introducing a community coalition working to expand employment opportunities to the concept of healthy living could help expand the ways in which members view the value of their collaborative undertaking: that is, not only are they creating jobs and helping to train people for them, this can also have positive effects on healthy living in the community. In other words, communities that believe promoting healthy living among their residents is important, but it is also important for communities to know that better transit, more affordable housing, complete streets, and more small businesses are essential to a thriving community.

Communities might not all be successful at building the type of organizational and collaborative capacity needed to achieve the changes they desire like improved educational attainment which is a more widely accessible transit system that can also improve healthy living. Successful community interventions for promoting healthy living could be through community participation and empowerment, and such participation and empowerment involve both the characteristics of the communities and organizations themselves and the broader aspects of the social, economic, environmental, and political context in which communities operate. The evaluation of community efforts is extremely difficult and complex, both to identify the effects of community action on the determinants of health and to identify the effects on health and healthy living (Fawcett et al., 2015).

There are multiple barriers, including the complexity of webs of influence and causation and the existence of many confounding factors. Much of the existing research on community-based interventions and on the effectiveness of collaborative efforts to improve community health has been of limited usefulness. Research findings have been mixed or negative on the effectiveness of partnerships, and insufficient duration may be one challenge (Shortell et al., 2012). Research also has primarily focused on the “low-hanging fruits” in this space such as individual-level interventions, single interventions, and interventions implemented under highly controlled conditions not generalizable to socioculturally diverse communities (Trickett et al., 2013). In addition to elements of a healthy community such as shared vision, value, collaboration and capacity, success of community participation and empowerment for healthy community is a function of the qualities of the community organization itself, such as committed, charismatic leaders, community support, and resources; the larger social, economic, environmental, and political conditions that set the stage for change.

Partnerships for Healthy Community

Communities working to promote healthy living or to address social or environmental conditions in their neighbourhoods may use different types of partnerships that include community-based organizations, government agencies and community members themselves.

Community-Based Organizations

Community-based organizations could include volunteer groups, churches, social groups, youth groups, committees, cooperatives and sports associations which are the organizational elements in which people come together to socialize and to address their broader concerns. Successfully addressing health issues, like other community interventions, requires the committed collaboration of organizations situated in and outside the health and health care sector (Hoying et al., 2012). Drivers for cross-sectoral collaboration to ensure a healthy community are quality of partnerships, investment in collaboration, and policies that support collaboration such as systems in place to encourage health as a mutual goal on an ongoing basis. Many organizations have identified the fostering of cross-sector or multi-sector collaboration as a key ingredient for promoting health and health equity (Mattessich and Rausch, 2014; Prybil et al., 2014). Multi-sector collaboration or the partnership that results when government, non-profit organizations, private entities, public organizations, community groups, and individual community members come together to solve problems that affect the whole community has the potential to solve systemic problems that affect health outcomes. A

multi-sector approach challenges the common silo approach to public health (and other fields), wherein advocates work only within their respective fields with little or no communication or alignment across fields. Although much can be learned from expertise in specific fields, the determinants of health do not reside in one sector alone, and no one sector, even health, holds the solution to improving healthy community. Moreover, cross-sector collaboration may also enable community actors to leverage a wider range of supports for community healthy.

Drawing on the resources, perspectives, and insights of multiple sectors to address a problem increases the likelihood of effective and systemic impact. In their assessment of the association between multi-sector population health activities and health outcomes over time, Mays et al (2016) reported that communities with comprehensive system capital and rich networks of organizations working together to effect health improvement experienced significantly lower death rates from preventable conditions (example, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and influenza) compared to communities without this capital. Achieving a healthy community depends on addressing the determinants of health in the broader context in which they are situated. Although there are policy strategies that can have a significant impact on all of the determinants of health, programmatic approaches depend on the community for successful planning, implementation and sustainability. If there is a focus on any one social or economic determinant, an intervention will require the involvement of the multiple sectors that overlap with the area of interest.

Government Agencies

Government agencies are important partners in achieving healthy communities. Community health is one of the greatest things in which a government can invest. Early prevention, which could be somewhat not expensive, can prevent serious health problems for communities. Government responsibilities for community health go beyond voluntary activities and services to include quarantine services, sanitation services, mandatory immunization and regulatory services. Government agencies also encourage community members to do things that benefit their health or create conditions to promote good health. Notable areas of government agencies include assuring adequate community health infrastructure, promoting healthy behaviours, preventing the spread of communicable diseases, protecting against environmental health hazards, preparing for and responding to emergencies.

Community Members

Effective community partnerships have well-articulated and shared vision, and it is reasonable to expect that success in addressing health inequities also requires a shared vision and shared values (Shortell et al., 2012; Mattesich and Rausch, 2014). Aiming for a healthy community as a shared vision and value is an aspiration; in many community-based partnerships to address any number of community challenges, a healthy community may simply be an implicit vision and value. Community members who come to know and trust their neighbours and have a sense of ownership and belonging in the place where they live are more likely to work collectively to solve common problems related to promoting a healthy community. True community-led action is only possible insofar as communities have the capacity to organize for healthy living. For a community to be able to change the conditions in which its members live, members need the capacity and ability to act; they need vision, leadership, voice and power. Thus, building community capacity is the primary mechanism that ensures the democratization of decision

making around healthy community. Furthermore, community participation and empowerment are critical for sustained change (Verbitsky-Savitz et al., 2016). For change to be long lasting, normative innovations need to be adopted into the very fabric of community social life. Communities with a greater capacity for social organization and collective efficacy are more adept at integrating change into community life because members of the community are themselves part of the intervention.

Depending on the community challenges being addressed, the appropriate range of knowledge and experience will need to be assembled. Individuals participating from different sectors bring to the table a wide range of knowledge and skills, and there may well be a need for capacity to work collaboratively, with attention given to differences in power and status, in order to attain authentic partnerships with members of the affected community. Just as a shared vision is important to unite a multi-sector collaboration, authentic partnership with representatives from all affected community segments is essential to help community interventions succeed. The current state of community health inequities did not emerge overnight or in a vacuum. Policies that intentionally or unintentionally create structural inequities based on bias, whether conscious or unconscious, and discrimination, whether blatant or subtle, continue to shape communities; some are decades old, and others are recent or under consideration. Communities working on interventions to achieve health equity need to engage in dialogue about or directly address these structural challenges in order to pursue effective and successful programs.

Components of a Healthy Community

The understanding that communities in which people live impact their health, it is necessary to build communities that support health. Norris and Pittman (2018) outlined core principles to which healthy community groups ascribe. Adhering to these principles is key to enriching the work of healthy community groups within a community. Because healthy community initiatives are multi-sectoral collaborations between community members and stakeholders, government, healthcare, business, non-profits and among others, healthy community initiatives must include:

- A broad definition of health and community
- A compelling and shared vision based on community values
- Improved quality of life for everyone in the community
- Diverse citizen participation and citizen-driven
- Widespread community ownership
- Collaborative problem-solving
- Focused on systems change
- Development of local assets and resources
- Measures and benchmarks of progress and outcomes
- Acknowledgement of the social determinants of health and the interrelationship of health and community

The outcomes of a healthy community initiative are to improve the health and wellbeing of community members and the community itself. The eleven key elements of a healthy community include according to Woulfe et al (2015):

- A clean, safe, high-quality environment (including housing)

- An ecosystem that is stable now and sustainable in the long term
- A strong, mutually supportive and non-exploitative community
- A high degree of public participation in and control over the decisions affecting life, health and wellbeing
- The meeting of basic needs (food, water, shelter, income, safety, work) for all people
- Access to a wide variety of experiences and resources, with the possibility of multiple contacts, interactions and communication
- A diverse, vital and innovative economy
- Encouragement of connections with the past, with the varied cultural and biological heritage and with other groups and individuals
- A city form (design) that is compatible with and enhances the preceding parameters and forms of behaviour
- An optimum level of appropriate public health and sick care services accessible to all
- High health status (both high positive health status and low disease status)

Benefits of Healthy Communities

There is no doubt that there are a lot of benefits of living in a healthy community. Some of the benefits are highlighted below:

Survival for Community Members

Members survive and thrive because of community. There's a saying that it takes a village to raise a child. There is so much truth in this. Studies also show that parents have a limited impact on a person's character. Their peers have a greater impact on who they are and become.

Better Physical and Mental Health for Community Members

Living in a community that allows its members to have good access to medical care, wellness amenities, and healthy foods boosts members' physical health. Research has it that mental health has is equally as important as physical health. Nurturing the mind, especially in time of crises, can greatly influence daily life of community members. Feeling included within a community can also impact the sense of self and purpose. This can be proven to be true through anything from having a fitness buddy to being involved in an organization or members' family.

Stronger Community Support for Community Members

Within a community, the social interactions members have can highly influence members' mental and physical health. Research shows that many mental and physical health conditions, including anxiety, depression, substance abuse, aggressive behaviour, asthma, heart disease, and obesity, relate to a particular environment. In order to sustain members' health, it is important to have a strong community that members are able to turn to and be supported by.

Cleaner Environment for Community Members

The physical environment in which community members live also plays an important role in their overall health. Scientists have asserted that environmental health comprises aspects of human health, disease, and injury that are determined or influenced by factors in the environment.

Educational Opportunities for Community Members

Educational opportunities are highly dependent on the community that members are involved in, as school access depends on district boundaries. Living in a healthy community with strong educational institutions and resources enhances members' well-being.

Social Connection and Engagement for Community Members

Social connection and engagement are associated with better physical health and a stronger immune system for community members who live in a healthy community, improved mood, and a lower risk of dementia. Healthy communities help community members bounce back from stressful situations, while adding meaning and purpose in life.

Community Adaptation for Community Members

Healthy communities protect and support the health and well-being of vulnerable members in adjusting and coping with adversity. Some key traits of resilient communities when dealing with big challenges are showing strong leadership, fostering social cohesion, communicating clearly, educating effectively, planning and implementing effective responses, and valuing positive thoughts and mental attitudes.

Access to Well-Balanced and Healthy Meals for Community Members

While it is especially important now for community members to eat regular, nutritious meals to protect and strengthen their immune systems, they may not be able to access good food easily or safely in a community that is not healthy. Living in a community that offers members nutritious, tasty meals makes regular healthy eating easy.

Safety and well-being for Community Members

A community that follows diligent infection control and prevention measures, and enhanced workplace safety processes, protects the health and well-being of members.

Advancement and Growth of Community Members

Community members advance as a society with new ideas and collective wisdom. They are able to solve problems quicker working together because they are able to bounce ideas off each other, debate, challenge each other, and add on to others ideas and knowledge. Community and teamwork allows them to search for and find the best answers and knowledge out there and make the best decisions.

Happiness for Community Members

When people are together, they produce oxytocin which is a natural anti-depressant. Community members do not need prozac in a healthy community and belonging. Members who feel as though they belong are not only healthier and live longer, but they are happier throughout their lifetimes.

Resourcefulness of Community Members

Community members give back to each another and share when they come together. They help each other by keeping each other accountable. With the right people, anything that is physically possible is achievable. The same goes for the right resources. A healthy community allows members to share and give with each other.

Create Relationships for Community Members

A healthy community allows members to essentially choose their family. Members are able to find who they genuinely and deeply connect with. Having healthy deep relationships also has a trickle effect on all other areas of members' lives such as their wellbeing, success, happiness and longevity.

CONCLUSION

The place of community participation and empowerment in promoting a healthy community are gaining popularity. The main assumption is that community effort can help to improve the quality of life of the people and also provide opportunity for socio-economic activities. Participation and empowerment have become part and parcel of development. However, the challenge is how participation and empowerment should be vigorously pursued to achieve developmental gains such as improving the living condition of the people. Based on the preceding illustrations of community participation and empowerment, it is clear that non participation of citizens in promoting health undermines a healthy community. It is, therefore, necessary that communities organize themselves into civic bodies that can represent their interests. In short, the birth of democratic Nigeria does not mean the realization of a more equitable socio-economic prosperity. This specifically means communities should not cease to organize themselves for development programmes commensurate with their enshrined constitutional rights, such as the right to life and overall human dignity. It has become clear that only concerted effort by community members can solve challenges including health, it is therefore significant to note that community participation and empowerment can promote a healthy community.

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