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INITIATING TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESS THROUGH COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAM: TWO CASES FROM ASIA

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Community education as an intervention strategy has been criticized because it mainly focuses on fixing the individuals without addressing the structural causes behind the problems. Nevertheless, addressing the structural cause of a problem may not be desirable or feasible in some cultural or sociopolitical contexts. Presenting 2 cases from Asia (Indonesia and Hong Kong), this article argues that the community education approach, which is commonly considered to be incapable of bringing systemic change, can also facilitate small wins and develop community capacity or competence ready for some larger scale change with longer term effects. © 2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Community education has been traditionally used as an intervention strategy to bring about change by providing training and education for individuals who are supposed to be incompetent in the area of change. This approach has always been consistently criticized because it mainly focuses on "fixing" the individuals without addressing the root causes behind the problems, thus reflecting a deficit and decontextualized orientation. An empowerment approach that understands the problem in terms of the inhibiting conditions rather than "blaming the victim" has been proposed as an alternative (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Rappaport, 1987).

However, a growing body of literature within the area of community intervention (Schensul, 2009; Schensul & Trickett, 2009; Trickett, 2009), community building

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(Minkler, Wallerstein, & Wilson, 2008), and system perspectives (Hawe, Shiell, & Riley, 2009) has highlighted that the dichotomy between individual deficits versus structural flaws may oversimplify the issue. Focusing on either the individual or the macro problem not only prevents us from understanding the complexity of community systems and change processes but also deprives us of capturing the dynamic nature of social ecology and the interaction of various components among the systems.

Thus, in this article, we use two case studies from Asia to argue that although community education has been frequently criticized, this strategy still has its potential to trigger change under specific political and cultural circumstances. Furthermore, understanding the way community education fosters social change can further our repertoire and ideas of initiating change. Before presenting the two cases, we provide a brief review of literature on social change processes.

ECOLOGICAL AND SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

According to some change experts (e.g., Hall & Hord, 2006, 2011), change is fundamentally a learning process through which individuals and collectives acquire new practices. The critical role of learning in the change process is noteworthy because it highlights that change is not a one-off event, but is built on continuous practices and a series of small successes. Furthermore, both the individuals and the collectives should be empowered before lasting change is sustainable.

Adopting the ecological and systems perspective, Hawe et al. (2009) also argue that any intervention is only an event in the system change process. They argued that what matters the most is not a particular intervention per se, but "the context or setting into which the intervention is introduced and with which the intervention interacts" (p. 269). In other words, while the specific intervention still matters, the key driver of change is about "how well the dynamic properties of the system are harnessed" (p. 270), and depends largely on the ripple effect or the leverage made possible by a particular intervention within the whole system.

Recently, scholars of community science have highlighted the critical role of issues arising from the implementation process to the success of the community intervention and the vision of social change (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Livet, Courser, & Wandersman, 2008; Wandesman et al., 2008). As they argue, individual, organizational and community factors all affect the process of implementation. The individual aspect is concerned with the characteristics and capabilities of the practitioners who implement the innovations (e.g., staff capacity). The organizational factor is related to the organizational functioning in the dissemination of programs, including both innovation-specific and overall organizational capacity (Livet et al., 2008). The community factor is about the community's readiness, resources, power, and overall competence in handing community problems. In the following section, case studies, review papers, and empirical findings are examined to understand how different intervention strategies targeted on different levels, from individual to the macro level, may lead to long term system change.

VARIOUS INTERVENTION STRATEGIES IN THE SYSTEM CHANGE

At the individual level, Pick and Sirkin (2010), drawing on their experience from Mexico, demonstrate that community change will be more sustainable if people's skills and knowledge could be enhanced and the psychological and contextual barriers could be reduced. Working with remote rural community residents in South Africa, Campbell, Nair, and Maimane (2007) demonstrate how they use the community training workshop as a way to promote the six dimensions of psychosocial resources (i.e., building knowledge and skills, creating safe social spaces for dialogue and critical thinking, promoting ownership and responsibility, promoting confidence in local strengths, building solidarity and bonding relationships, and bridging partnerships) that allow a community to competently respond to AIDS/HIV challenge. Allen, Lehmer, Mattison, Miles, and Russell's (2007) empirical study of 209 health providers in 12 health care settings demonstrates that the successful health reform implementation is critically related to individual providers' knowledge and skills and a parallel organizational change. Zanbar and Itzhaky's (2013) study of 163 community activists, active agents in societal change, also indicate that their competence is essential and closely related to other community factors, such as supervision by community organizers, sense of belonging in the community, citizen participation, and perception of leadership. Thus, as Campbell et al. (2007) argue, promoting the capacity of the individual members and the community are certainly critical building blocks for comprehensive and systemic change in the social hierarchies.

At the organizational level, Allen's (2005) study of 43 domestic violence coordinating councils indicates that the internal functioning of the council is important for success. Javdani and Allen's (2011) recent analyses of 654 members from 21 councils further demonstrate that the council leadership and supportive council climate significantly relate to whether the council members feel empowered and the councils can become an empowering context to promote sustainable changes in response to intimate partner violence. Collecting data from eight community boards and 23 provider agencies, Livet et al. (2008) indicated that leadership, shared vision, process advocates, and technical assistance were common organizational variables that consistently relate to the use of comprehensive programming frameworks (a good practice tool to ensure quality implementation). Maton's (2008) review of empirical studies also summarized the various pathways by which empowering setting can lead to social change. They include providing people with a group-based belief system, opportunity and role structure, meaningful core activities, a nurturing relational environment, leadership, and the organizational mechanism that can adapt to both internal and external challenges.

At the community level, the use of community building to promote social change has been acknowledged and documented (Minkler et al., 2008; Minkler, 2005; Rothman, Erlich, & Tropman, 2008). Within this community-based work, the underlying objective is to mobilize community members in the social change process and provide them with skills and resources so that they are able to influence policy decision (Blackwell, Minkler, & Thompson, 2005). For example, the effective community coalition was shown to be critical to the success of the prevention effort in 21 Pennsylvanian communities (Feinberg, Greenberg, & Osgood, 2004). By using coalition building and scientific study, Jason (2012) demonstrates how he works with advocacy groups of patients with chronic fatigue syndrome (a contested illness often labeled as "Yuppie flu,"), which ultimately lead to a change in leadership in the federal government level and changes in medical and public perception of the illness. With respect to policy change, Jason (1991, 2013) also demonstrates how he used knowledge and research to influence the regulatory and legislative policies so as to affect societal change. Certainly, policy change and the community-based prevention efforts mutually influence and sustain each other (Pentz, 2000).

While addressing the problem in a broader and structural way, policy advocacy or community organizing can also be done in a disempowering way if, in the process, the targeted community members are passively positioned as the object of expert intervention. In addition, the outside experts may be insensitive to the cultural and sociopolitical context within which an intervention is implanted or transplanted, relying heavily on outside experts will also deprive the local community of participation and ownership, which is essential to lasting change (Minkler et al., 2008). Thus, the capacity-building approach is preferable, so that the community is capable of implementing and sustaining change. Capacities required for a change may vary across context and issues, which may include, but are not limited to, leadership, network building, or coalition (Goodman et al., 1998).

Therefore, the previous literature and limited evidence seems to indicate that individual competence, organizational capacity, community readiness, and policy context do matter and they intertwine with each other to effect lasting change. We may further argue that, whatever the strategy, all roads may lead to Rome. The fundamental problem awaiting us is not which strategy may lead to change, but the extent and conditions under which the different strategies are able to facilitate large-scale change and how. Certainly, more evidence is needed and it is believed that it largely depends on the sociocultural context in which an intervention is enacted. In the following, we would like to introduce two cases from Asia to demonstrate how community education strategy could facilitate small wins (Weick, 1984) and develop community capacity ready for some larger scale change with longer term impacts.

THE CASE OF SURABAYA: URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT

Community education programs have transformed Surabaya into an exemplary city for its urban environment improvement. Previously recognized as a big industrial city, overcrowded, and polluted, in July 2012, the city was awarded as one among the four best cities in Asia Pacific in terms of its urban environment management by the Citynet¹ The improvements were often attributed to the leadership of the city's present mayor. However, years before the mayor took her role, a long history of community education activities to raise awareness of the environmental issues have planted the seeds for the current promising environmental changes. Having lived in the city for 8 years and conducted research about a community-based environmental program in the city, the second author can observe how community education promotes the city's environmental change.

One of the most promising changes in the city's environment is the success in solid waste management practice. In average, the city generates approximately 8700 cubic meters of domestic waste per day, but only one final disposal site of about 3.5 hectares (Silas, 2002) exists to manage the waste disposal. Consequently, only 60% of the waste could be managed. Uncollected and improperly handled solid waste has spilled over into the streets or has been disposed illegally into rivers (Vigil, 1987). Therefore, Surabaya's pollution featured in the city's daily scenes is the result of the discrepancy between the current rate of solid waste production and the poor solid waste management system and practice.

Corruption and abuse of political power have been a chronic ill in government institutions; it is not hard for ordinary Indonesians to understand that the root cause of various community problems (including poor urban environmental management) is due to structural factors rather than the poor awareness of the people. In waste management,

¹The Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements.

it is the absence of the waste policies at the national level and weak enforcement of waste regulation at the local level that creates the problems all over the country. The inadequacy is reflected by the "low priority in the local government's annual budget allocation, low private sector participation, and lack of infrastructure" (Meidiana & Gamse, 2010, p. 200). Given such circumstances, designing a program to educate the community about proper domestic waste management to address the urban environmental problems can be considered remedial rather than radical. However, in the case of Surabaya, such an approach has been conducive to promoting broader changes.

In Surabaya, the low-income families living in slum neighborhoods were the groups who had to experience the consequences of poor solid waste management of the city.² Responding to this situation, local environmental NGOs organized community education programs aiming to improve the environment of the neighborhoods. They started with modest goals like raising awareness of having green and healthy neighborhoods, promoting the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) principle and sharing practical skills like making a tool for home-based organic waste composting practice. As some of the local environmental NGOs were based at universities, the program's execution had created possibilities for networking. The involvement of international bodies and aid agencies had brought both technical and institutional supports for the NGOs, which were hard to get from their own government.

Pusdakota (Indonesian term for Urban Community Empowerment Center), working among the poor neighborhoods, is one such local NGO that has been actively promoting the 3R movement since 2002. Initially, Pusdakota's focus was to raise community awareness about environmental problems through a series of discussions, community consultations, and workshops. Later in 2004, in cooperation with Kitakyusu International Techno-Cooperation Association (KITA) Japan, Pusdakota created a simple and low-cost composting tool, namely, Takakura (a composting basket made from used cardboard). The technology is very simple, yet its impact is remarkable. At the beginning, a pilot project of using Takakura was promoted to only 1,500 households. The participating households took voluntary action to convert organic waste into compost by using Takakura. The method not only has resulted in the annual reduction of organic waste, as much as 180 kg/household per year, but also eliminated foul odors and sewage problems, normally resulting from illegal dumping and burning.

Furthermore, the practices increased household income from the compost selling. The success of Pusdakota's pilot project eventually drew the local government's attention. After granting Pusdakota a patent for the Takakura method, in 2006 the Surabaya city government expanded the use of Takakura to 7,000 households. Overall, Pusdakota reported that the composting practice had reduced the daily amount of waste from 1,500 tons in 2006 to 1,150 tons in 2008.³

As described, the program helped the community members to get connected to the academics in universities as well as with activists from overseas. Such interactions developed the community members' personal as well as communal pride. Because of their low political and economic status in the community, combined with the patronizing political system of the government bureaucrats, community members are often skeptical of interventions targeting the neighborhoods' condition, not believing that they would

²For example, combination of poor solid waste management and inadequate drainage systems brought annual flooding during the rainy season, which normally resulted in the outbreak of waterborne diseases.

³See http://kitakyushu.iges.or.jp/publication/KITA-report(Eng).pdf, and http://www.rrrkh.ait.ac.th/pdfs/PUSDAKOTA-%20Indonesia.pdf

make any difference to their lives or neighborhood conditions. The idea that ordinary people can contribute to social change was considered to be difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, it took years of community education programs before the NGOs finally got the neighborhoods' support for the promoted ideas, and that trust and healthy interactions between the community members, local NGOs, academics, and international activists were established (Nomura & Hendarti, 2005). Long before the ultimate goal–turning slums into green and healthy neighborhoods–had been achieved, these continuous interactions had facilitated both the community members and the local NGOs activists to experience the smaller but important achievements. They include promoting a collective belief that change can be fostered through a bottom-up approach, identifying local leaders, and promoting community participation and connectedness.

The success of community education programs was later replicated. Through the corporate social responsibility programs, several private companies provided financial and technical supports to the program. Eventually, the programs found the momentum to be officially established as citywide programs when the newly elected mayor happened to have a strong concern with urban environmental issues. The then mayor furthered the idea by initiating several iconic environmental programs that have brought changes in a wider scale. For example, since 2005, the Surabaya Green and Clean,⁴ a cleanliness competition among neighborhoods, has been conducted annually. Initially, there were 325 participating neighborhoods, but in 2009, the number rocketed to 2,774 neighborhoods.⁵ However, such achievement would be impossible without the initial commitment of a number of slum neighborhoods and ongoing community education programs, which persistently disseminated ideas about creating green and healthy urban environments.

THE CASE OF HONG KONG: INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY ALLEVIATION INITIATIVES

The case in Hong Kong is about a \$300 million HKD government-led, territory-wide mentoring initiative⁶ that targets intergenerational poverty alleviation, namely, Child Development Fund (CDF). Being involved in the evaluative study of CDF pioneer project, the first author has insider knowledge about the recent and current development of CDF. While Hong Kong is a society of prosperity, income inequality in Hong Kong is greater than in many developed countries. Indeed, the Gini coefficient of Hong Kong reached 0.537 in 2011, showing the huge gap between the rich and the poor. A leading cause of poverty is the economic restructuring of the society toward a knowledge-based economy, which has led to polarization of wages, meaning that a lot of low-skilled workers have become marginalized and ended up in poverty (Chief Executive, 2010; Wong, 2000).

In addition, skyrocketing property prices and wild inflation plagued Hong Kong's economy, making the wealth disparity between the rich and the poor even more striking. Furthermore, to avoid becoming a welfare state and creating a dependence culture, the social welfare policy in Hong Kong tends to be minimal and incremental (Wong, 2000). As a result, people from a poor background can easily stay in misery. To deal with the

⁴See http://www.uclg-cisdp.org/sites/default/files/Surabaya_2010_en_final.pdf

⁵In average, one neighborhood consists of 80–100 households. See http://www.hls-esc.org/documents/ 2hlsesc/06-2HLS_TIA_CommunitySWMBestPracticesSurabaya_TriRismaharini.pdf

⁶While CDF is a government-led initiative, a numbers of small scale community based mentoring projects were already taking place before CDF began (see Chan & Ho, 2006, 2008). Their successful experience was later adopted by the government, and the idea of mentorship became one of the core components of CDF.

rising income gap and intergenerational poverty, the government established the CDF in 2008⁷ to provide disadvantaged children with more development opportunities. At the time of writing three batches, a total of 40 projects have rolled out, benefiting more than 4,000 children in Hong Kong.

The territory-wide program in Hong Kong comprises three major components: target saving, mentorship, and goal planning. The program not only provides education to underprivileged children and families about financial literacy and goal planning but also helps develop their nonfinancial assets through mentorship opportunities (Chan, Lai, Ng, & Lau, 2013). The findings of the evaluation report about the pioneer project were generally positive, showing the beneficial effects of the program on children's positive attitude and behavior toward life goal planning and the establishment of stronger adult networks beyond their immediate family. Nevertheless, the evaluative report has also identified several barriers for the program to continue or scale up. In particular, training and support for volunteer mentors and financial literacy for parents have to be strengthened, and the organization capacity should be built up (such as the online monitoring system and the district-based network partnership between the operating NGOs and other funders or organizations) if the programs could have a more lasting effect. (See Child Development Fund, 2013 for details.)

While the program is still in early stages, the CDF pioneer project has already initiated a few "tangible first steps" (Campbell et al., 2007, p. 362) that may lead to larger scale change in the future. For example, some local organizations or network groups working for the poor have been set up: a faith-based network that helps mobilize the faith communities to become the mentors of CDF⁸; a community-based charity that raises money from the community to match the personal savings of the participating youths⁹; and a nonprofit training organization that promotes a caring adult culture and provides both content and facilitation infrastructure necessary for the quality implementation of mentorship programs¹⁰ (see Chan et al., 2013). Furthermore, a business-oriented alliance was launched, in the latter half of 2013, intending to support future CDF projects (such as providing work shadowing or exposure opportunities).

In addition, because of the three unique components of the programs, the operating NGOs need to build innovative partnerships with a wide range of organizations that were not normally required in other social service programs, including faith-based organizations, training organizations, business sectors, and various government departments (see CDF Consultancy study, 2013). As a result, the CDF project provides an arena for the multisector collaboration and paves the way for a more durable mechanism between the various stakeholders to emerge.

At the time of writing, the new chief executive had promised to tackle the wealth disparity in his political term because of the rising social grievances. Several high-profile initiatives have been advertised in advance, including the launching of old-age living allowance, the re-establishment of commission on poverty, and promise to set a poverty

⁷The first batch of the scheme (the pioneer project) rolled out in December 2008, see http://www.cdf.gov.hk for more information.

⁸The predecessor of Hong Kong Church Network for the poor is a church campaign for the unemployed which was set up in early 2000s to raise funds from churches to create jobs and start up business opportunities. By the late 2000s, as the employment situation in HK improved, the campaign was formally renamed and changes its focus to helping the poor break the intergenerational poverty. One of its key ministries is to support a few faith-based organizations to run CDF projects. See http://www.hkcnp.org.hk for details.

⁹See www.cdmf.org.hk for details.

¹⁰See www.qmn.hk for details.

line.¹¹ Despite its potential to become an eye-catching project in future social policy, whether the CDF project will be institutionalized, expanded, or paid attention to by the chief executive, is still in question. Its future development depends on many other factors (such as policy priorities, responsible government officials, community leader support, and the political environment), but the ground works (such as the effective implementation of the pioneer project, the newly established community organizations, and the creative partnership developed among stakeholders) are indeed the building blocks to prepare for bigger change.

DISCUSSION

After presenting the two cases, we would like to draw on several key reflections about the conditions under which community interventions could be lasting.

The Community Intervention Should Fit the Situation

Recently, Trickett (2009) conceptualized intervention to be multilevel, community-based, and culturally situated in nature. Thus, an effective intervention with lasting effects has to be multilevel and community-based as well as culturally fit the situation. In both aforementioned cases, the advantage of community education in facilitating broader change is closely related to the political and sociocultural context of the country. While it is not hard to recognize the structural causes of community problems in Indonesia, exercising radical actions to change the situation is a different matter. Indonesia is now generally labeled as a country in transition to democracy, but repressive political practices are not history yet. The situation was even worse decades ago when Indonesia was under the New Order Regime (1966–1998). During that era, any progressive actions targeting the authorities' unpopular policies or programs could raise repressive responses, from imprisonment without prosecution to loss of one's life. In the case of Hong Kong, social harmony was not only the predominant theme and idea in the Chinese philosophy but also the normative exercise of political action in Chinese society (Liu & Kuan, 1988). Thus, an incremental self-improvement strategy, rather than a radical approach, was commonly used. It was also better received by the public because of the societal emphasis of the political stability. Under these conditions, community education could be viewed as less intimidating and sociopolitically appropriate to the local context. As a result, the years of practice in community education can provide people with an arena for further community organizing, which is necessary for bigger change.

The Importance of Intervention in Multiple Levels

Although this article argues for community education to be more appropriate to the given context, we do not deny the fact that effective community intervention should be multilevel. As the environmental problem and intergenerational poverty (shown in both cases) are also complex issues, involving both private and public domains, we need to call for multiple strategies targeting both individual and social dimensions that contribute to the problem. In the case of Hong Kong, while the structural cause of poverty in Hong

 $^{^{11}}See http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201211/09/P201211090266.htm and http://www.news.gov.hk/en/categories/health/html/2012/12/20121210_142412.shtml$

Kong mainly lies in the housing and conservative welfare policy of the government, the lack of financial planning knowledge and nonfinancial assets (such as social capital) further marginalize the underprivileged and make them vulnerable to risk. In the case of Surabaya, while the environmental problems are due to the lack of effective solid waste management system and policies, the community education programs can provide people with practical tips on how to better their lives. Thus, instead of changing something distant without immediate effect, community education programs provide people with more tangible skills and knowledge to address their own issues. More importantly, they can engage people in striving for their well-being, which is the core idea of participation (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000). Certainly, community education is not the end. As shown in both cases, community organizing and policy advocacy are necessary, especially when the movement is mature and in momentum.

The Importance of Small Wins and Sustainability

Under the repressive political atmosphere (like Indonesia) or unfavorable sociocultural conditions (like Hong Kong), conducting community education programs can be considered more as a symbol of resistance than a symbol of support toward the status quo. It is because, under an overwhelming authority or a depressing setting, it is easy for people to feel powerless and lose their faith that a change is (still) possible. Therefore, maintaining a belief that change is possible is a form of resistance. In this case, then, community education is more like a guerrilla strategy to gradually diminish the ruling power because radical opposition often results in premature death of the movement and magnifies the sense of powerlessness. On the contrary, having small wins not only develops within the people a sense of control but also builds up the corresponding capability to bring further change. Dealing with oppressive power or unfavorable situations is like joining a marathon competition. What is required is not the speed but the persistence and perseverance. That is what community education can provide.

The Importance of Community Readiness and Capacity

In both cases, the emergence of relevant local NGOs and the building up of coalitions and networks, either local or international, are also critical to sustaining the movement and expanding the initiatives from a small scale to a wider scale. In the case of Indonesia, local environmental NGOs started emerging in the late 1970s. Instead of having a serious concern toward environmental issues, it was a political tactic taken by community activists (Gordon, 1998; Nomura & Hendarti, 2005). In the era when any political activity was strictly limited and controlled, the regime tended to ease its control over the environmental NGOs as the environmental issues were considered apolitical and not threatening the status quo. As a result, organizing a community action under the umbrella of local environmental NGOs was a viable option as they were "one of the only (somewhat) acceptable forum" and "many environmental NGOs have begun to serve as focal points for political activism" (Gordon, 1998, p. 11).¹² In the case of Hong Kong, the organizational capacity and community readiness were also highlighted as determining whether the pioneer project could scale up and become institutionalized. If the emerging coalition network and multisector partnership, which is under way, work well, then the

¹²In fact, some of the environmental activities from that era transformed its existence into resistance movements, which eventually contributed in bringing down the regime in the late of 1990s.

government may be more positive toward the movement. It may also support the responsible government officials in the political striving for more resources and further change in the future.

To conclude, lasting social change does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, the community has to prepare itself and develop the capacity when the change momentum comes. Community education, despite a remedial intervention approach, is in line with the political and sociocultural context of the two highlighted Asian cities. It not only engages the individuals in striving for a better life but also provides continuous "small wins" to sustain the energy and enthusiasm for a movement or an ideal that may take years to accomplish. Furthermore, it provides a platform to develop partnership and networking and enhances community capacity and readiness, which is essential to lasting change.

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