Training Pack for Youth Workers

Module: Community – based interventions

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1. INTRODUCTION

"*Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much*".

Hellen Keller

If you care about your community and believe that individuals can foster social change when working united, but still wonder how you can do something in practice, then this module will guide you through! If your ultimate goal is to contribute positively to the well-being of your community, here you will find plenty of information and ways to stimulate you and motivate others to join you. By reading this module, you will discover that the key element of social change rests in the core of the community and by harnessing its assets and resources, the transformation will eventually emerge.

In this module, we will explore community-based collaborative methods that contribute to resolving recurring issues, either simple or challenging, that hinder the growth and development of the community. Community interventions emerge as important and more effective in improving the quality of life of the community, as their main principle is to assign the leading active role to the community members themselves. They also recognize the strength and capacities of individuals and through joint actions they can bring the desired results.

An important role is also assigned to Youth workers, who have the ability to initiate and guide such interventions, as connecting links between young people and the community. Youth workers can help young people develop soft skills and encourage them in participating in activities that benefit the community. Young people can function as change agents, since they can later employ the principles and practices of community-based interventions to resolve issues that directly affect them.

Throughout this module, the importance of united communities in problem-solving will be highlighted, once of course they identify and recognize their own resources, that will be employed to address their issues. Participatory actions and comprehensive initiatives are the core of a democratic society, that defends and fights for social justice and equity, and thus aims for development and prosperity.

2. LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this module, youth workers will be able to:

- Describe the concept of community-based interventions.
- Recognize the impact of community-based intervention programs.
- Understand the important role of communities in problem-solving.
- Learn to assess community needs.
- Design an action plan for an intervention following step-by-step instructions.
- Understand the importance of mobilizing community resources and partnerships.
- Define Asset-Based Community Development.
- Apply Participatory Action Research.
- Understand the benefits of Collective impact initiatives.

3. REFERENCES TO EU POLICIES

- European Social Fund (ESF) - The ESF is one of the EU's structural funds aimed at promoting employment, enhancing social inclusion, and improving the skills of the workforce.

- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) - ERDF aims to support regional development projects across the EU, fostering economic growth, job creation, and infrastructure improvement.

- European Green Deal - This comprehensive EU strategy focuses on achieving climate neutrality and promoting sustainable growth. Community-based interventions related to environmental sustainability, renewable energy, waste reduction, and biodiversity conservation resonate with the goals outlined in the European Green Deal.

- Horizon Europe - The EU's flagship research and innovation program, Horizon Europe, supports various initiatives aimed at addressing societal challenges, promoting innovation, and advancing scientific research.

- Erasmus+ Programme - This EU program supports education, training, youth, and sport. Community-based interventions focusing on educational programs, vocational training, youth development, and cultural exchange can align with Erasmus+ priorities.

4. CHAPTER I Introduction to Community – Based Interventions
4.1. Defining Community-Based Interventions

Community – Based interventions refer to programs and initiatives that aim to address recurring problems among a defined local community. They can serve multiple purposes and, when properly planned and implemented, they prevent and reduce complex social, economic, and environmental factors that cause dysfunction within the targeted population. The interventions are designed to employ programs, policies, or strategies to achieve their goals and are usually based on collaborative work mainly through the involvement of community members in the process. They might include parental educational programs, health, educational and prevention programs, economic and social development programs. In cases of effective execution of the intervention the community can benefit by improving the well-being of its residents. For example, interventions can achieve sustainable, long-lasting results and social changes, after the completion of the program. They could work as a resource of extracting data about the nature of the community and its needs and guide future program initiatives. More importantly though, they can leverage policy changes in favor of the community, while simultaneously saving individuals' lives.
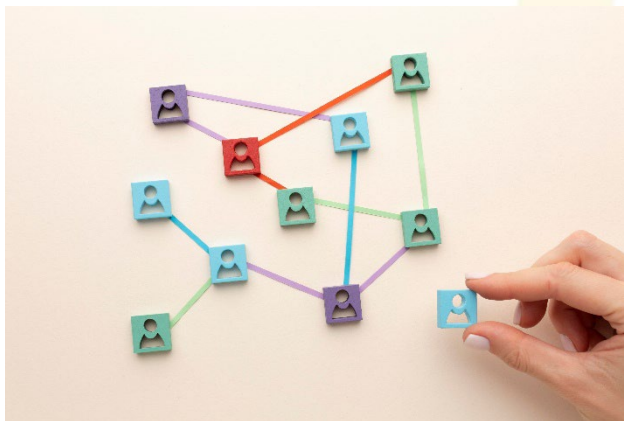
Community – based intervention is therefore a dynamic process, which aims at community progress. Interventions emerge as community members establish common vision and objectives, that lead to an action plan to address their needs. Developing a healthy environment in a local community requires long-term planning and implementation. Changes not only take place locally, but they also affect the society, economy, and culture, thus creating a diverse environment. Opportunities arise for individuals to strengthen their socializing skills, to improve their well-being and become empowered. In the framework of the intervention, community members are not treated as objects and simple end-users, but as active partners in managing their social life and the development process; they recognize their needs and problems, they develop skills and gain control over the changes enforcing their autonomy and the democratic operation of the community. Community members can form pressure groups that can claim benefits and services from the state, while protecting and exploiting their own resources for social change.

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4.2 The Role of Communities in Problem-Solving

Human evolution is directly intertwined with the concept of community. Communities were initially formed to address various survival issues and later evolved through collaboration and mutual aid. Communities are primarily referred to as the geographical setting, the location where a group of people live but also as the environment for the genesis of new ideas and practices. Nowadays locality is not exclusively the basic characteristic of a community, but political, professional, ideological, or cultural orientations can work as criteria for community formation. The role of the community over the years has become vital due to its contribution in different fields, such as education, health, culture etc.; community is the key driving force for social development. The sense of belonging and the bond among members, the solidarity and the dynamic of mutual support relationships are basic dimensions in this community concept. Functional communities contribute significantly to the quality of life and can be characterized as sustainable and effective in terms of the goals they set.

For a successful community intervention, using participatory methods is considered as a vital component. The use of the term participatory implies that all stakeholders are involved in a way that they can raise their voice, express their opinions and thoughts, while they can also argue or challenge others in a democratic way. Everyone's perspective is respected, and they all participate in the planning process, the decision-making, and the implementation of the intervention. Thus, an inclusive environment is created, and community members gain ownership while they try to tackle their own problems. There are several advantages of the community-solving approach. Since community members are the main agents of planning and implementing the interventions and at the same time live inside the community, they have a mutual understanding of their challenges, threads, opportunities, and their capabilities. Consequently, they can more efficientl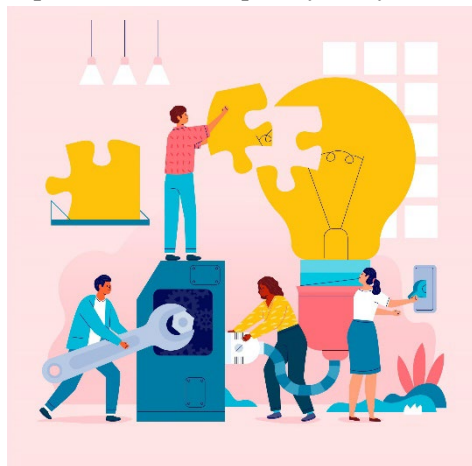y conduct a needs assessment and identify their problems, while it is also more likely to get to a sound decision-making process and ultimately reach their goals.

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Community problem solving is also used in schools where students are called to identify and address real life problems. This is an approach to make students actively involved and develop communication, team-building and social skills, critical thinking abilities and make a change. Preparing youngsters in participatory methods can benefit the community at a later stage, enhancing democracy, since they become familiar with democratic processes and soft skills.

4.3 Theoretical Frameworks for Community Interventions

In literature, there are several attempts to approach the term community-based, since it covers a wide range of meanings. Usually, community represents the *setting* for interventions, it is defined by geographical factors, such as a neighborhood, a school, a town etc. The goal of such interventions is to foster changes in the behavior of individuals, that will lead to reducing the risk of the problem's expansion in the wider community. The term can also refer to the community as the *target* of change itself. In this model, systemic changes in public policies, services or institutions gradually promote prosperity and well-being in the community. Another application of the term community-based focuses on community as a *resource*. This model is structured on the notion that community members' participation and sense of ownership is the key element to success. Lastly, community-based might refer to community as *agent*, which emphasizes developing and leveraging the capacities of the community to address the needs of community members.

Sherry Arnstein proposed in 1969 the Ladder of Citizen Participation, which is widely considered as an influential model in community participation. Arnstein's central argument is that in democratic environments, power should be distributed equally to all parties, so that they can all be benefited; in this framework, citizens gain power by participating. The metaphorical ladder features eight rungs, a bottom-up approach, that describes three levels of citizen participation: Non-participation, Degrees of tokenism, Degrees of Citizen Power. In brief, the eight rungs of the Ladder of Citizen Participation include:
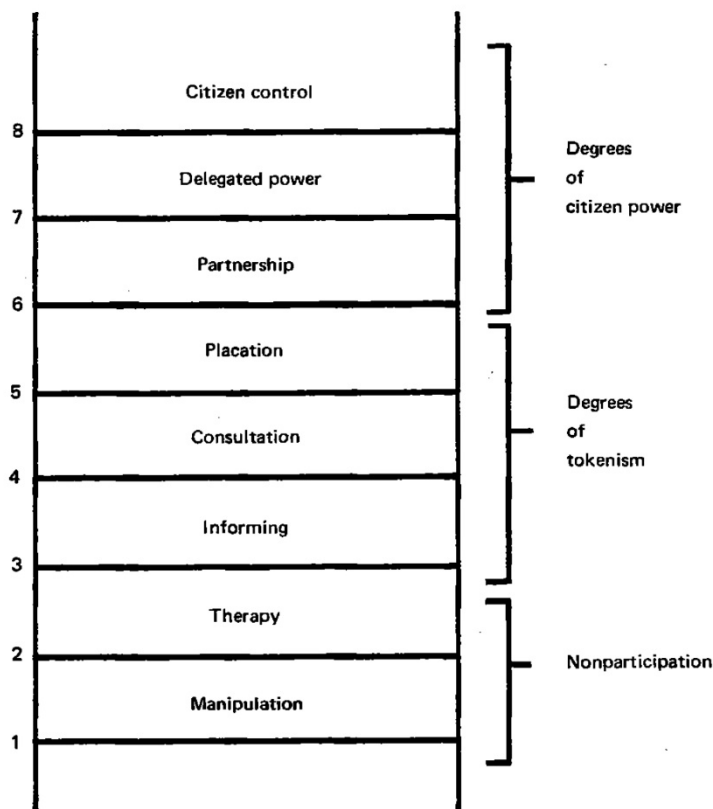
1. **Manipulation**: this occurs when citizens are illusively given power, for example by participating in advisory boards or by participating as passive components without a substantial role in protests.
2. **Therapy**: citizens are engaged in activities that aim to help them rather than fighting the root of the problem.
3. **Informing**: the information provided to citizens is usually superficial and one-way, being unable to provide feedback or make a dialogue.
4. **Consultation**: citizens can express their ideas, but there's no guarantee that these will be considered.
5. **Placation**: here citizens have a limited degree of influence, but they are involved only for maintaining the pretenses.

6. **Partnership**: in this rung, citizens have the right to negotiate with powerholders and share responsibilities on decision-making processes or planning.
7. **Delegated Power**: citizens are merely in charge of a program, by having control over the management, the funds, the decision-making.
8. **Citizen Control**: in Arnstein's words, when "participants or residents can govern a program or an institution, be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which 'outsiders' may change them."

5. Chapter 2: Planning and Implementing Community-Based Interventions

5.1. Assessing Community Needs and Assets

Assessing local needs and resources is important for the community's future improvement. Needs are the gap between the current situation and the desirable, where a community aspires to be, while resources include all the assets (human resources and intangible) that can be used for improvement. Each community is a mosaic consisting of people of different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds that have their own needs and assets that must be revealed. To get a comprehensive view of the community and to address the issues that it is facing and effectively utilize its resources, it is important to understand the community's structure and environment, the community members' opinion and then set priorities. The assessment will work as a tool to clarify the intervention's objectives and help identify the means to achieve them in a logical and effective way. It will also allow community members to actively participate in the process and highlight their priorities, that an external observer might miss. Using community-based participatory methods will increase the members' trust and give them leadership, thus increasing their capacity.
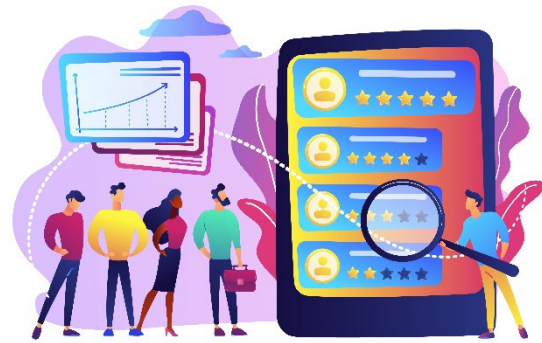
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Needs and resources assessment should be done regularly throughout the intervention program and not be limited to the beginning. It can be conducted with the use of a survey with an informal or formal structure. Surveys are valuable because they will supplement the static observations along with further and detailed information. They might also highlight other possible existing needs and can align the subsequent actions with the objectives. Furthermore, they will engage more people into the program who will support its implementation. The first step to launch the assessment is to form a group that will help gain a comprehensive understanding of the community by recognizing the core information that should be collected. The group will also be responsible for identifying further sources of information that will provide more data, such as organizations and institutions working in the community. A person should be in charge of collecting and then analyzing the data, while at the end the results should be shared with the community. Therefore, the assessment is vital for it highlights the community's priorities, the capability gaps or even the strengths to be utilized.

5.2. Developing a Community Action Plan

A structured procedure that meets the community's goals is highly important to be set forth from the early stages of the intervention. This will maximize the percentage of feasibility and success and will keep the members focused on the initial goal without overlooking to details. Thus, an action plan is a vital tool that could help the community organize how they will meet their objectives based on a detailed plan, with specific steps. Based on the needs and assets assessment, the problem and its negative impact on the community is identified making the vision of the intervention clear, that will show the path for a step-by-step action plan; the action plan should turn community vision into reality.

Image by Freepik

As a first step, a group of people should be convened to develop the action plan. It is important to include members from various backgrounds, target groups and sectors in the community to provide a holistic view of the problem and brainstorm on how to proceed to its solution. The group will then develop the action plan and program the following actions, while they will have to inform all interested parties about it. Tasks should be assigned to everyone, so that each member has a role and a mission in the plan. During the implementation of the action plan, the group should coordinate, review, and evaluate the actions to take corrective measures when needed. The action plan should be followed up regularly, through phone calls and face-to-face meetings, and members should fulfill their commitments and meet the deadlines. In summary, the action plan should include the following:

- **What** needs to change.
- **What** actions or changes will occur.
- **Who** will carry out these changes.
- **By when** they will take place, and for how long.
- **What resources** are needed to carry out these changes.
- **Communication** (who should know what?).

After the accomplishment of each step/task, the group should celebrate the work done keeping members motivated, excited and giving them credit. The action plan, when concrete, clear and updated provides credibility and accountability to the group, while fosters optimism and positiveness for the future outcome.

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5.3. Mobilizing Community Resources and Partnerships

Community members are a vital part to accomplish an intervention, however the community readiness should not be taken for granted. An initial evaluation of the degree that community members can respond to the intervention and address the issue should be taken. The perception of a problem is not always the same by everyone, since some might not recognize it as an issue or might not think it occurs constantly. Also, the community might lack motivation to address the issue, or its efforts are not efficient. For these and many other reasons, a structured and planned community mobilization should be set forth, so that the actions will be taken collectively, and the degree of success will rise. Participatory approaches ensure that everyone's voice is heard, community members take ownership over the results, while different experiences, knowledge and capabilities are considered. They also provide transparency, since community members know the processes and the decisions made that affect them and at the same time they can recognize if members are equally treated and included.

There are a lot of models and strategies that can be followed for mobilizing community resources and partnerships and thus improving the quality of life in the community. Firstly, a survey on energizing the community around the issue should be undertaken, highlighting the locality of the community and its problems, its priorities, and other previous experiences. For a depth understanding of the context and assessing the needs and challenges the community might face, usually a focus group is organized, in which community is represented by various segments, men and women, minority groups, professionals etc. A working group should be convened to share its visions and action plan to achieve the best results, while a SWOT analysis is an important tool to highlight the groups' weaknesses, on which the focus should be shed. Then, an advocacy campaign should be carried out to engage media and citizens in various activities, volunteerism, public consultations etc. Therefore, community resources mobilization is a process stimulated by community members and other resources to undertake collective action for improving community life. Members initiate a dialogue, where themselves have a predominant role over the issues and the solutions that affect their lives.

Community mobilization can be achieved using various resources, such as leadership, assessment, organizational and operational management, communication. More specifically, having a strong leadership team, while engaging diverse parts of the community that actively participate and share their opinions, inspires trust and credibility. Internal communication is important to keep members on the same track and community should be educated and included. Communities take initiatives and act independently, while citizens are self-mobilized based on personal or communal motivations.

Resource mobilization is the optimum utilization of resources, in a timely and cost-effective way, where resources, mechanisms and partners are put together to achieve the initial objectives of the action. Natural, human, moral and cultural, material resources are all considered and can be provided by organizations/institutions, national governments, private sector businesses or it could be individual support. Resource mobilization is based on 3 pillars, building relationships, communication, and organization management. Using resource mobilization has several advantages, like providing independence, managing own funds, expanding collaboration and enhancing participatory approaches, and developing sustainability.

6. Chapter 3: Approaches and Models for Community-Based Interventions

6.1. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

It is often observed that communities in the face of various problems seek external help and support, which is considered more professional, better equipped with resources and knowledge, and therefore more effective. Emphasis is placed on the community's needs and problems, while its capacity and strengths are sidelined. At the same time, limited use is made of the members' abilities and skills and community assets, forming the impression that communities are a mass of people with complex and diverse problems. On the contrary, each community has a unique set of skills, gifts and assets that can be harnessed and thus improve the quality of life; everyone has something to offer.

"Asset Based Community Development" (ABCD) is a strategy for sustainable community driven development. Beyond the mobilization of a particular community, ABCD is concerned with how to link micro-assets to the macro-environment. The appeal of ABCD lies in its premise that communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing, but often unrecognized assets, and thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunity"[1]. Thus, ABCD is the means to build healthier, safer, prosperous, and inclusive communities with citizens as primary contributors. ABCD invites us to start with a focus on what's strong so that we can use what's strong to address what's wrong, and that way make what's strong even stronger.[2]

Current approaches that are commonly used are deficit-based, emphasizing on what is lacking, on the problems and needs of the community, hence they do not bring effective institutional reform. They are mostly using top-down strategies and citizens are considered as passive receivers and unqualified, thus creating distance among the community members and isolation. However, ABCD approach is community-driven and participatory, where citizens are empowered to act as agents of change, that will gradually result in sustainable and social development.

The capacity of the community is initially identified so as the assets of individuals, that will be afterwards exploited. Research shows that there are five key assets of the ABCD approach:

1. <u>Individuals</u>: As the core asset, residents of the community are considered gifted, full of assets, that should be identified and later used.

	Deficit Based	Asset Based
Purpose	Changing community through increased services	Changing community through citizen involvement
Method	Institutional reform	Citizen-centred production
Accountability	Leaders are professional staff, accountable to institutional stakeholders.	Leaders area widening circles of volunteer citizens. Accountable to the community.
Significance of Assets	Assets are system inputs. Asset mapping is data collection.	Assets are relationships to be discovered and connected. Asset mapping is self-realization and leadership development.
Production Resource	Money is the key resource. Falls apart without money.	Relationships are the key resource. Falls apart when money becomes the focus.
Operating Challenge	How do we get citizens involved?	How do we channel and build on all this citizen participation?
System Dynamic	Tends to spread itself thinner over time.	Tends to snowball over time.
Evaluation	Success is service outcomes, measured mostly by institutional stakeholders.	Success is capacity, measured mostly by relationships.

Deficit Based Process vs Sustainable Community Development Asset Based Approach

Table retrieved from ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, Transform Integrated Community Care https://transform-integratedcommunitycare.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ABCD-paper_v03C.pdf

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[1] What is Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), Toolkit by the Collaborative For Neighborhood Transformation in https://www.neighborhoodtransformation.net/
[2] https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/about-abcd/

2. <u>Associations</u>: are small informal groups, mostly run by volunteers, that don't have individual interest but can contribute to community mobilization.
3. <u>Institutions</u>: structured groups of people, mainly professionals, working on a paid basis (e.g., private business, governmental agencies) that help establish a sense of civic responsibility.
4. <u>Physical</u> <u>Assets</u>: natural resources, land, buildings.
5. <u>Connections</u>: an important segment of the community. Connections are built through one-to-one interaction of individuals, who form gradually a network of people, a community.

    The ABCD approach has been tested and deemed successful following basic steps and principles. Firstly, it is important to collect stories, since they will provide a solid portrait of the community and will map out the members' gifts, skills, and assets. Also, they can highlight what is important to people and how they can get motivated. Secondly, a core group should be formed, consisting of people who have shown commitment or leadership skills and can apply this approach by building networks and relationships inside the community. Then, the capacities of all 5 asset groups involved should be identified to make better use of their strengths and build community power. Everyone's abilities and contribution are accountable and appreciated, while places privately or communally owned are available. The community will understand that the local economy becomes better through the maximum use of its own resources. An important step is to build new relationships and strengthen existing networks, since people recognize the benefits from collaborative work and participation. Thus, a great commitment is required of all members involved. Lastly, when the vision is clear and the process is structured and organized, the outcome is more likely to be achieved; this creates self-mobilization of community members, who constantly enlarge the community network and set new goals to which they work towards.

https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/about-abcd/

youthIES

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6.2. Participatory Action Research (PAR)

"Action research" has been initially defined by Kurt Lewin in 1946 as an iterative cycle of research aimed at problem solving. Its main deviation from other methods is the combination of research and action, that effectively leads to a change. It has a twofold objective, firstly to investigate the needs/problem of a group of people and provide them with useful information, and secondly to engage people in the process of solving it using their own skills, capabilities, and knowledge; thus, they gain greater awareness of the situation and take action, while the power from the external researcher rests on the community. PAR is a method that stresses the importance of the participation of the interested parties with the aim of improving the quality of a social aspect. In this case, where all interested parties take active control over the design, the implementation and the evaluation of the research project, democratic principles and social justice prevail. The concept of PAR lies in the ability to bring positive change through research and action, which is carried out by the community's involvement. This results in the development of strong bonds among the community, which are enhanced through collective decision-making processes, dialogue, and values. In summary, PAR's main objective is to combine theory with action, and evaluating the process with the aim of bringing change, communicating diverse ideas and solutions within the wider community. PAR is nowadays widely used as a methodological tool in educational environments to engage teachers in research processes for improving teaching and learning conditions practices.

In opposition to other methods that follow a linear model, PAR is a spiral action research, that is based on the recurring structure of planning, implementation, observation, and evaluation. The starting point is a problematic situation, an issue that concerns the community and calls for direct intervention. The community itself is the one who will identify and prioritize the problems and define what kind of change they desire.
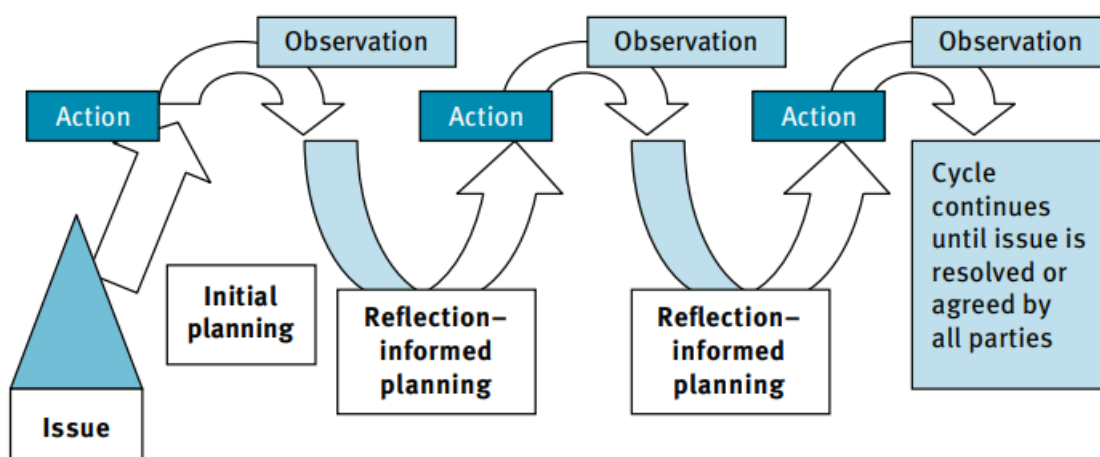

Figure 1: The iterative cycle of participatory action research (PAR), extracted from Maggie Walter, Participatory Action Research

During the planning phase, a collaboration among the researcher and the community members is established to assess the problem, identify useful resources, and then develop the plan. In order for both the researcher and the community of interest to collaborate productively, a substantial two-way and symmetrical communication is necessary. The implementation phase follows, during which observations of the action and

its outcomes are taken. Finally, the participants reflect and evaluate the success of the action to inform and shape the next cycle, which continues in as many iterations as needed to reach the desired objective and results. This circular procedure allows participants to be flexible, learn from their mistakes and adjust to reach maximum results. It is prerequisite, during all four stages, that the action if fully collaborative and that the circle closes only when the initial issue is solved.

Participatory Action Research is considered an effective method to engage youth, who are most of the time marginalized in collaborative research and evaluation stages due to lack of trust or understatement shown by adult researchers. However, the involvement of youth in such processes is important since they seek to address social issues that they themselves face. In PAR projects, where youth are actively involved, it was observed that they have developed multiple soft skills, such as leadership, communication, and research. By giving young people leading roles in problem solving, they get more aware of the social issues that surround them, which leads to the gradual development of critical thinking and empathy. Positive outcomes were also observed on communities, since the application of PAR allows them to be proactive and helps them enhance their capacity.

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In conclusion, the selection of Participatory Action Research method is usually made because of its applied nature, linking theory with practice, that focuses on social change. It entails participation and equal collaboration between the members involved. It also offers a flexible implementation framework (the open circular-spiral process), through which the participants act and reflect to understand, change, and improve their everyday circumstances; the reflection stage is a key element for success.

6.3. Collective Impact Initiatives

In the realization that complex and multidimensional social issues cannot be resolved by single entities, emphasis is placed on comprehensive actions utilizing the resources of multiple various components. Social issues increase rapidly, and state initiatives are proven inadequate to challenge and address them. Collective impact refers to the well and long-established commitment between multiple actors from different backgrounds to a specific plan that will resolve a particular social issue, that is considered and has been assessed as complex. In this respect, there is a need to relocate from traditional problem-solving ways to more innovative and collective.

The collective impact framework is based on five key conditions:

1. Common Agenda: all participating entities come together to define the problem and agree on a common agenda, which favors the community of interest, while they share the same vision on how to address it.
2. Shared Measurement: all participants agree on using a common set of indicators to track progress and measure results, so that all efforts are accountable, and improvement is made.
3. Mutually Reinforcing Activities: a reinforcing plan of activities is advanced encouraging individual activities and various approaches to be in alignment with others.
4. Continuous Communication: consistent and open communication strengthens relationships and enhances trust and commitment.
5. Backbone Support: it is vital to have a centralized, independent entity that provides continuous support to the group, aligns, and coordinates the activities to ensure they aim they initial purpose.

In the collective impact approach four structural components are recognized, the steering committee, the working groups, the backbone support, and the community engagement. The steering committee is established at the initial stage and is responsible for the general oversight of the group, for providing guidelines and monitoring progress. The working groups' role is to identify strategies that will achieve the objectives, communicate frequently to keep the community engaged and implement the activities. Backbone support works independently to support the collective initiative, by highlighting the strategy and vision of the group, supporting the activities throughout, and mobilizing resources. Finally, engaging the community is crucial to success, giving power, voice, and ownership to the wider public.

8. SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

In this module, the concept of Community-based interventions has been developed, an alternative method to problem-solving that helps people be actively involved and advance social change starting from community level. Multidimensional, complex, and challenging social problems rapidly arise, mainly in the sphere of health and education, and research show that community-based intervention programs have the potential to address them. They employ dynamic processes that firstly contribute to map out the community's needs and then chart a common vision and plan to resolve recurring issues. In this way they improve the quality of life within the community and contribute to the overall social progress and development.

Through these community-based interventions, the important role of the community is highlighted, which is often overlooked, as the leading role in solving problems is held by governmental organizations and agencies. Instead, by giving space for action to the community, which knows the priorities and issues that concern them, citizens are transformed from passive observers to active participants motivated and willing to change. In the context of these interventions, participatory action is strengthened, democratic principles are promoted, and social inequalities are catalysed.

Throughout the module, the goal was to highlight the potential of the community based on everyone's individual skills and knowledge, while usually, the emphasis lies on a third party's intervention, an external expert, and what is deficit. On the contrary, all available resources must be used properly, thus encouraging citizens, who recognize their contribution. Also, Participatory Action Research emerges as a useful tool that benefits the community and any environment it is applied, as the iterative spiral process followed allows errors to be identified and the issue to be revisited for optimal results.

By leveraging community-based approaches, young people can take an active role in issues that directly affect them and feel useful in the community. At the same time, through these methods and strategies, they develop personally; this is important as young people are the future. This module can be useful for youth workers, who support groups of young people in their personal development, for they can guide them to collaborative and comprehensive approaches to solve their problems. Thus, they will recognize the power of the community and that even complex issues can be resolved in a spirit of collaboration, joint activities, and mutual vision.

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