# **COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

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### *Introduction*

### *What is community education?*

*Let us first define the term community. The term community is used to describe a group of people who though with diverse characteristics are linked by some social ties. The group may share some common perspectives and may engage in joint actions, in the same or different geographical locations. The term community may be based on core elements that include location, elements of sharing, common action, some social or cultural ties and diversity. This means that although the group of people has some links there is an element of heterogeneity*.

Community education is a process whereby learning is used for both individual and community betterment. Further, community education may be defined as a process of personal and community transformation, empowerment, challenge, social change and collective responsiveness. The field of community education is about providing the knowledge and skills for people to not only be self-sufficient and independent, but to create and utilize the interdependencies that must also exist in the society. It empowers people to identify, realize and manage their resources effectively and wisely. Through its philosophy and holistic approach, community education builds the capacity of groups to engage in developing a social teaching and learning process that is creative, participative and needs-based. Community education seeks to create a participatory learning culture that incorporates principles and practices of respect, mutual aid, inclusiveness, lifelong learning, skill building, self-appreciation, entrepreneurship, and leadership development.

Community education seeks to build linkages and ensures that the mission is about sustaining communities through education and learning. It reaches out to and engages groups that are not supported by formal education institutions or who would benefit from training and other learning opportunities. It is a vibrant and ever-changing field, unique and interdependent, adapting to the needs of communities by responding with programs specifically tailored to a specific area. Community education is based on principles of justice, equality and inclusiveness. Community education is creative, flexible, dynamic, inclusive, empowering and could also be challenging.

# **Principles of Community Education**

Community education is based on the following principles:

1. **Self-determination**: Community members understand their situation hence are better placed to recognize what is most appropriate for them. Parents as their children’s first teachers, have a right and a duty to be largely involved in their children's educational matters.
2. **Self-help**: The most suitable way to serve people is to nurture their capacity to help themselves. People gain self-reliance instead of dependence, when they accept ever-increasing responsibility.
3. **Leadership Development:** The identification, development, and use of the leadership capacities of local citizens are prerequisites for ongoing self-help and community improvement efforts.
4. **Localization**: Services, programs, events, and other community involvement opportunities that are brought closest to where people live have the greatest potential for a high level of public participation. Ideally, these activities should be decentralized to locations where the community members can easily access them.
5. **Integrated Delivery of Services**: Organizations and agencies that operate for the good of a community can use their limited resources, meet their own goals, and better serve the public by establishing close working relationships with other organizations and agencies focusing on related purposes.
6. **Maximum Use of Resources**: The physical, financial, and human resources of every community should be interconnected and exhaustively utilized in order to meet the diverse needs and interests of the community.
7. **Inclusiveness:** Community programs, activities, and services, should involve the broadest possible cross section of community residents irrespective of age, gender, religious, ethnic, social, economic or any other differences.
8. **Responsiveness:** Programs and services should respond to the continually changing needs and interests of the community members.
9. **Lifelong Learning**: Learning begins at birth or earlier and continues until death. Formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities should be available to community members of all ages in a wide variety of community settings.

# **Importance Of Community Education**

Through its political agenda and social purpose, community education challenges outdated norms, structures, values and supports critical reflection. It also empowers besides enabling community members to play an influential role in shaping their lives. A large number of persons in extremely needy situations or area can be effectively reached through community education. Community education is the best way of learning and teaching nonhierarchical situation.

For development in a community, the members need community education. Community education should target all people irrespective of any differences. Human beings are social and interdependent. Consequently, educational decay in a member of a community adversely affects others. Other aspects that make community education important include: -

1. It liberates people from dependency syndrome.
2. It increases ability for people to act as part of a united community for improved living.
3. It provides learning opportunities that address the needs of the community and the individual while ensuring that the learners' experiences are recognized, valued and used as part of the learning process.
4. It nurtures the wellbeing of the participants and their community.
5. It creates a collaborative and creative learning experience that facilitates and supports learners’ involvement.
6. It empowers the group focused on to put into practice and perpetuate both locally and nationally, the values of community education.
7. It supports the empowerment of people to identify specific actions needed with regard to their issues and understanding of the reason why collective action should be taken.
8. It encourages community members to critically analyze their existing political, social and economic structures.

**Challenges that require Community Education**

There are some challenges that can only be solved through community education. Such include: -

1. ***Rapid population growth*: -** Often people think about raising the number of children they can be able to feed. Hardly do some people think about the infrastructure and the public facilities available. This means that if one family is well-planned and the others in the neighborhood are not, there will be competition for the few resources and thus maims children’s optimum performance. This means that community members need to be enlightened on issues pertaining to family planning.
2. ***Economic disparities:* -** The gap between the rich and poor can only be reduced through community education. In many Kenyan communities the poor are subdued to such an extent that they adore the rich. Some poor people will spend a whole day discussing the rich. Even when exploited they consider it an opportunity to work with them. Such people need community education to help them out of their helplessness and work towards self-actualization.
3. ***Environmental degradation*: -** This is exploitation of available resources due to deforestation, inappropriate waste disposal, soil erosion and air pollution. Community members continue to mess with their natural environment oblivious of the consequences. For proper regulation of seasons there must be trees in a vast environment. This calls for all members’ participation. Hazards such as air pollution directly affect the entire neighborhoods indiscriminately. This means that a member who does not get involved in polluting the environment will also be affected by activities of others.
4. ***Politics:* -** When there is scramble for power, members of a community require empowerment in order to make wise choices. In Kenya politics, ethnicity has always been misused due to ignorance of the masses. There is need for members of the community to have an exposure of the actual values that they should seek for in an aspiring politician.
5. ***Conflict:*** - Conflicts often occur due to ignorance. There is need to provide community education to warring communities in order to help them solve their problems without causing unnecessary harm to others most of whom are often blameless*.*
6. **Marginalized population:** - These could be internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees from other countries. IDPs are not internationally recognized, thus their needs may not be externally met or addressed. These people need community education to help them become aware of ways in which they could participate for effective living.
7. **Epidemics:** - When there is an outbreak of an infectious or a contagious disease, community members require education on how to prevent the spread of a disease or how to take care of their affected kinsmen
8. **Urbanization:** - Since independence, there has been the tendency of rural-urban migration. Most of the migrants move from rural to urban areas in search for employment. They need awareness on how they could utilize the locally available resources for their livelihood.
9. **Harmful traditional practices**: - Community education is necessary to create awareness on the dangers associated with some traditional practices. This helps the community members to avoid some of the self-instigated problems that the community members often find themselves in. Community education prevents the members from excommunicating or sidelining those who shun the harmful practices.

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