

# Theoretical Foundation for social Mobilization and Citizen Participation

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**ABSTRACT:** Social Mobilization involves assembling resources and utilizing them for the common good based on the principle of citizen participation with a goal to empower people for collective action. Citizen participation is regarded to be an outcome of social mobilization. Several theories try to explain why people engage in citizen participation while putting into account personal and social processes. There is no theoretical approach integrating all aspects of social mobilization. The Resource Mobilization Approach suggests that resources are central in the empowerment of social groups to launch collective action. The expectancy-value models suggests that people make projections regarding possible outcomes before engagement while empowerment theory emphasizes actions, activities and structures involved in the attempts to gain control over challenges. The social capital model of citizen participation emphasizes the nature of the social relationships and the bonds that keep the community members connected, while the functional motivation theory suggests that all volunteers engage in volunteerism as a means of satisfying underlying psychological functions. The social role theory of gender points out that while women put others needs before their own, indicating a sense of self – sacrifice, the males are seen to engage more in heroic and magnanimous helping.

**KEY WORDS:** *Social mobilization, citizen participation, resource mobilization, empowerment, social capital*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The paper explores the main tenets of six theories that attempt to explain aspects of social mobilization and citizen participation. These include; resource mobilization approach, expectancy –value theory, empowerment theory, social capital model of citizen participation, functional motivation theory and the social role theory of gender. Some gaps are highlighted and an attempt is made to identify similarities while amalgamating complementary theories.

## II. THEORIES OF SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

Social mobilization is a broad scale undertaking to involve people and get them engaged in participation to achieve a specific goal through self-reliant efforts. Mobilization is the process by which a group assembles resources, both material and non-material, and places them under collective control for the explicit purpose of pursuing the group's interests through collective action (Canel 1992). It addresses the needs of a given community, it is based on the principle of citizen participation, with the goal of empowering individuals and groups for action. It is through psychological empowerment that social mobilization ultimately culminates into citizen participation (Wandersman & Florin, 2000).

In order to understand citizen participation, it is crucial to comprehend social mobilization. There are several approaches from the social sciences that attempt to explain and guide social mobilization and citizen participation. The theories tend to focus on factors such as internal motivations, cost-benefit analysis, social and group dynamics, availability of resources, participants' expectations as well as gender. The theories try to provide an explanation as to why people engage in voluntary activity while putting into account personal and social processes that lead up to citizen participation. To date there is no theoretical approach that integrates all these aspects of social mobilization.

According to the Resource Mobilization Approach (RMA), develop by McCarthy and Zald (1977), people willing to participate are aware of their desired goal and believe that it can be achieved through collective action. The theory places emphasis on how groups get themselves organize to pursue their goals and how they mobilize and manage resources. The Resource Mobilization Approach suggests that resources such as knowledge, money, hours of labor, solidarity and legitimacy are central in the empowerment of social groups to develop organizations and launch effective and successful struggles to achieve the desired goals. The resource mobilization approach places emphasis on the dynamics and strategies of social movement growth, decline, and change with special interest in societal support and constraint.

According to McCarthy and Zald (1977), a major assumption of RMA is that, explaining collective behavior requires detailed attention to the selection of incentives, cost-reducing mechanisms and career benefits that lead to collective behavior. Though the theory mentions importance of incentives to keep participants active and career benefits to maintain volunteerism, it assumes that all groups have resources. Therefore the theory will have difficulty explaining the mobilization of citizens in very poor communities that do not have resources.

Our expectations about the consequences of our actions are seen to be crucial to the decision to take part in voluntary activity. Our evaluations of the likely outcomes may generate positive or negative feelings will also influence the decision to participate (Palmgreen, 1984). According to Green (2002), Expectancy-value models in psychology encompass notions such as attitude, motivation, choice and decision and the amount of effort that people are willing to disburse on a task has to do with the degree to which they expect to succeed at the task, and the degree to which they value the task and value success on the task. People are seen to make projections regarding possible outcomes before engagement in the activities. Expectations about, and value of, the incentives directly influence the willingness to participate. The willingness to participate in a social movement can be defined as a function of the perceived attractiveness or aversiveness of the expected consequences of participation (Klandersman 1984). The drawback according to Ogu (2013), individuals may not be rational in making decisions. Quite often the decisions are made in a haphazard manner unlike what the theory postulates.

Empowerment theory by Zimmerman (2000) emphasizes actions, activities and structures involved in the attempts to gain control over challenges that lead to outcomes like perceived control, skill and proactive behavior, coalitions and accessible community resources.

Rappaport (1984) goes ahead to stress that empowerment is a mechanism by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery of their own lives. Empowerment is therefore regarded to involve a psychological sense of personal control as well as social influence. Individuals do exert control over others in the groups they live and work with and in turn the groups also do exert control. Empowerment is seen a process that nurtures power created in the relationships nurtured and hence used to master and gain control over their environment. It is a cognitive state characterized by the development of a sense of perceived control (Menon 1999). The theory provides a good foundation for the explanation of empowerment and that the power nurtured can lead to gaining control and ultimately build confidence in participation. However it is silent of social psychological variables that are key in the said relationships that underlie and influence social mobilization.

The social capital model of citizen participation emphasize the nature of the social relationships and particularly on cooperative relationships (Putnam, 2000). Social capital is regarded to be the bonds that keep the community members connected to one another and the networks developed with other individuals and institutions which, in way empower community members. The community members and the interactions among them are the resources that drive citizen participation which agrees with resource mobilization approach.

The functional motivation theory postulates that individuals engage in purposeful activities to fulfill a certain goal and individuals can perform the same activities to serve different psychological functions (Clary et al., 1998). The theory tries to reveal underlying motivations of volunteering. Different volunteers may engage in volunteer service to fulfill distinct psychological functions. Clearly the functional approach is a multimotivational perspective. That is, according to this perspective, volunteerism may serve more than one motive for an individual and, also, different motivations may be served within a group of volunteers performing the same activity (Houle et al 2005). All volunteers engage in volunteerism as a means of satisfying underlying psychological functions and this is in agreement with the resource mobilization approach. The functional approach attempts to identify personal motivations in order to comprehend the reasons and goals that motivate volunteers (Snyder, 1993 as cited in Widjaja 2010). Clary & Snyder, 1999, (as cited in widjaja 2010) emphasize that acts of volunteerism performed by different people may appear identical but could be triggered by different underlying motives and that these motives symbolize different psychological functions. The functional approach demonstrates how important it is to match volunteer motivations volunteering outcomes or benefits. Studies show that matching benefits with personal motivations has positive volunteer outcomes (Houle et al 2005).

Eagly and Crowley (1986) developed the social role theory of gender and helping. According to this theory, the female sex role promotes the role of nurturant and caring helping. They accentuate that females are more likely than males to provide emotional support and display empathy. Eagly and Crowley stress that generally women are expected to put others needs before their own, indicating a sense of self –sacrifice. The males, on the other hand are seen to engage more in heroic and magnanimous helping. Men are expected to engage in their helping in dangerous and risky situations. Risky situations are likely to attract men to help as they provide the opportunity to become a hero.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

The resource mobilization approach has its focus on availability of resources and that makes it difficult for the theory to explain how poor communities are able to mobilize their members into collective action,

however RMA utilizes the idea of psychological empowerment and regards empowerment to be essential for effective engagement in collective activity. Hence empowerment theory is compatible with the RMA theory.

The expectancy value models focus on the projections that potential participants make regarding participation. The perceived consequences are seen to drive the motivation to engage. This corresponds with the functional motivation theory that postulates that volunteers engage in volunteerism as a means of satisfying underlying psychological functions. These psychological functions are regarded as the positive outcomes or even incentives that are highlighted in the resource mobilization approach. Similarly males and females differ in terms of the activities they choose to engage in as a result of the projections and different psychological functions that serve as incentives for the different groups.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to gain an intimate an in-depth understanding of social mobilization and citizen participation, there is a need to develop a comprehensive theory of social mobilization and citizen participation involves. This will involve exploring variables of the social psychological nature that affect the evaluations and projections of potential participants. Refinement of empowerment theory is paramount to more clearly understand the natural settings in which individuals may gain a sense of empowerment, describe how and why interventions designed to empower individuals fail or succeed. This involve an amalgamation with the resource mobilization approach and the social capital model of citizen participation.

Future research also needs to explore personality characteristics and how they influence the decision to participate in voluntary HIV/ community activities.

It is essential to focus future research on the mechanisms involved inthe empowerment process, given that empowerment seems to be central in the decision to engage made by the potential participant. It is paramount to isolate the contextual factors that may interfere with or foster the development of empowerment.

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