Developing rural communities' strategies in addressing cultural obstacles: Enhancing health and wellbeing for sustainable development

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Abstract: Rural communities face various cultural challenges that hinder their ability to enhance health and wellbeing, which is essential for sustainable development. Among them are cultural and social norms that may prioritise short-term needs over long-term health and wellbeing. Healthcare providers are hindered by cultural and linguistic barriers, as they might not be able to speak the local languages or understand the local customs and norms. Programmes targeted for community development are not easily accessible to everyone. This paper explores strategies to address cultural obstacles encountered by rural communities in enhancing their wellbeing for sustainable development. A systematic review approach was adopted to fulfil the objective of this study. The Cultural Humility Framework was applied to emphasise the importance of understanding and respecting the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of rural communities. It involves self-reflection, openness, and willingness to learn from others. Findings indicated that rural communities require a collaborative effort among stakeholders and policymakers to develop culturally sensitive and sustainable solutions. The study recommends culturally responsive interventions and programmes strategies to address the unique challenges faced by rural communities.

Keywords: Cultural humility framework, Health and Wellbeing, Rural communities, Sustainable development. Corporate community involvement

Introduction

Sustainable development according to Adanlawo and Chaka (2024), sustainable development denotes a quality state that needs to be kept and preserved for the foreseeable future. This implies that the demands of the natural environment, both present and future generations are the main concerns of sustainable development. Integrating human, material, and ecological imperatives in a way that aligns with the UN resolution on poverty alleviation is fundamental to sustainable development (Hauenstein, 2019). According to this resolution, there would be intolerable differences in socioeconomic progress across the human race. The primary cause of conflict that jeopardizes harmonious relationships within and between our communities is these imbalances and inequalities (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987:43) of the United Nations defines sustainable development as change that meets current challenges without limiting the ability of future periods to address their own specific issues. The government, non-governmental organizations, and other entities are working to enhance our local communities and promote sustainable development in the fields of general wellbeing, education, and health. Development literature appears to ignore the fact that norms and certain cultural practices in many African communities either directly or indirectly prohibit some people, government institutions, and organizations from taking part in community decision-making and participatory activities. The current development debate has made it clear that contemporary discourses on development have focused more on socio-economic and political issues than on social norms and harmful cultural practices that prevent people from effectively participating in community development (Shackleton et al., 2021; Azurre et al., 2022).

Of course, cultural differences—one is language difference, which hinders oral communication between the bureaucrats and the community members (Genishi and Dyson, 2015). The relationship between bureaucrats and community members during program implementation is impacted by the fact that government and organization

officials tend to be from urban backgrounds and have significantly higher levels of education than rural residents. According to Gans-Morse et al. (2018), the second concerns bureaucratic attitudes and behaviours and a lack of cultural sensitivity toward the community members. The third is the role of religion in impeding secular education. Due to language barriers, community development professionals can misrepresent their intentions when proposing a project and are unable to understand the requirements of locals. As a result, a project is approved that members might not want. The community members often interpret this as a deliberate attempt by the higher authorities to revise their proposed project and sometimes refuse to cooperate in the implementation of the project.

Cultural awareness, respect, and good communication tactics can help overcome issues that come with managing language hurdles and cultural differences (Tomec and Gričar, 2024; Kenesei and Stier, 2017). To encourage and facilitate cross-cultural experiences, governments and organizations play a critical role. This entails formulating laws that support cross-cultural communication as well as offering tools for learning, working together, and making opportunities accessible. Cross-cultural program implementation and continued support require cooperation and collaborations between many stakeholders.

Theoretical background

Cultural humility framework

Cultural humility is a practice of self-reflection on how one's own background and the background of others, impact teaching, learning, research, creative activity, engagement, and leadership (Wright, 2019). Cultural humility entails a continuous process of introspection and self-reflection along with an openness to picking up knowledge from others. It entails starting a connection with someone else with the goal of respecting their values, customs, and beliefs. Gottlieb (2021) itemises the key attributes of cultural humility as follows:

- Openness
- Self-Reflection/Awareness
- Lifelong learning
- Institutional accountability
- Empathy and compassion
- To be "other-oriented"
- Acknowledging Power Imbalances and Balancing power imbalances

Foronda (2023) explains that to understand what cultural humility is, one can look at what it is not: "prejudice, oppression, intolerance, discrimination, stereotyping, exclusion, stigma, inequity, marginalization, misconceptions, labelling, mistrust, hostility, misunderstandings, cultural imposition, judgmental, undermining, and bullying."

According to a framework of cultural humility, no one who grows up in a social environment is free from bias. Our families, schools, the media, the medical community, law enforcement, and other social systems all teach us about the perceived value of our identities and those of others. To become better advocates and allies for our clients and ourselves, as well as to expose the ways in which we have been consciously and unconsciously taught to misjudge one another, every practitioner, without exception, has areas of conscious and unconscious ignorance or bias that we can work to uncover (Dávila-Montero, 2022; Gordon and Overbey, 2022).

Instead of depending on what we believe to be true, cultural humility requires each of us to own our cultural relativism, maintain an attitude of open inquiry, and be eager to learn. It is a caring approach that meets the client where they are as well as each of us where we are. It simply asks that we continue our own path of self-exploration and awareness, acknowledging that understanding our identity landscape and social location is an ongoing process in which deeper levels are revealed as we have the courage to keep inquiring. Cultural humility has no finish line, and a key component is the ongoing exploration of self.

Community and sustainable development

We the author of this paper take the term *community* to refer to people who live in a specified geographical area, sharing common norms within a socially acceptable structure and to whom development initiative was directed. Maintaining progress over a specific time frame is referred to as sustainable development (Chaka and Adanlawo, 2023; Ruggerio, 2021). According to Neupane (2016), a sustainable community is one in which individuals are consistently able to pursue the things they value. According to Stephen (2016), development is a process of transformation and expansion that raises people's standards of living, contentment, and freedom.

One can approach sustainable development from various angles. According to Marris (2018), at whatever level,

involves a neighbourhood's or crucial ability to initiate, manage, and finance change. The ability to do fundamental leadership and critical thinking, organize and program considering issues, and have resources to complete tasks and exercises are the metrics used to test this limit. According to Mensah (2019), sustainable development is commonly recognized as having three facets: financial, social, and ecological. The author highlights that addressing necessities and creating naturally competent development that will take into account a better conveyance of assets to all individuals are two ways that sustainable development enhances human improvement.

The classic writings of Evelyn (1664), who proposed that sustainable development is characterized by a society in which resources are mobilized and used optimally to meet human development needs and priorities while preserving natural resources for future generations, provide a more credible theoretical foundation for sustainable development. The goal of sustainable development is to establish a society where the distribution of resources is determined by the values of justice, stability, and balance (Abramovich and Ruggerio, 2023; Vasiliu, 2021). According to current theories, sustainable development must be understood considering the world's rapidly changing climate and how it affects ecological and human systems. Warburton (2018) emphasizes the connection between community and sustainable development, asserting that the SDGs offer a comprehensive framework for analysing sustainable community development. To maintain continuity, sustainable community development seeks to achieve a balance between the demands of nature preservation and human development.

The importance of rural development

Rural development is defined as any program intended to enhance the general well-being of a particular community and its residents (Pain and Hansen, 2019). It refers to any initiative aimed at enhancing the standard of living for the most vulnerable residents of the community. According to the author, it can also refer to any form of activity carried out with the goal of enhancing the community as a whole. Development is defined in this study as a shift in the level of living, with potential for sustainability in the future.

People view development as a complicated topic. According to Amel (2017), development is any evident advancement linked to group activities. According to Voulvoulis et al. (2023), development is a means of achieving independence, which empowers people to lead responsible lives. Development, according to a UNDP Report from 2005, is growth that results from adjustments to national institutions and social structures, which lessens prejudice and ends poverty among the populace. The following were identified by the report as important development issues:

- Social Progress (as including more noteworthy access to learning, better nourishment and wellbeing administrations).
- Growth with value interest, and opportunity (especially strengthening, law-based administration, sexual orientation balance, common and political rights and social freedom).
- Sustainability (for future eras in natural, financial and social terms).
- Human security (security in everyday life, against endless dangers like yearning and unexpected disturbances, for example, joblessness, starvation, strife).

Obura (2022) defines rural development as a system in which each individual in a community actively engages in projects that have the potential to further the community's social and economic development. The local community must take part in initiatives as co-owners if they are to be sustainable. The author highlights that some of the fundamentals of community development programs are as follows:

Engage in active consultation with community

Active consultation with the local is seen as a basic to suitable community development. Constant consultation with the local community leaders will aid the organisation to build better relationship which will assist in knowing what is best for the community.

Build trust

Building trust between an organisation and local community members is important to the success of any project. Creating trust may be hard to build and difficult to sustain. Continuous consultation and involvement are important to creating and sustaining trust with the local community.

Manage expectations by clearly defining roles and responsibility

Government agencies and organisations need to identify their duties to community development if not, they would not be able to meet up with the expectations of the local community residents. Expectations that are not well

managed can result in mistrust between the business and local community.

Set quantifiable objectives and provide details regarding progress

An organization and the community it serves can evaluate the program's strengths and weaknesses by defining goals and tracking results. Being so open and honest will be essential to fostering trust among the community and pave the way for the program's potential success.

Plan for sustainability

Activities ought to be outlined so their effect proceeds long after the organization's inclusion. Setting a timetable to hand over duty with quantifiable objectives and benchmarks is fundamental to maintaining a strategic distance from reliance (Obura, 2022).

According to Chaka and Adanlawo (2024), The improvement of society can result from rural development. Numerous programs could be classified as community development, according to Newell (2002:95) (Pawar, 2019). The author suggests that to enhance the educational opportunities for the people living in the area, a literacy campaign may be started. Health care clinics are another venue where free testing for a particular condition could be provided to increase public awareness of medical issues.

Naghdi Dorbati and Sanaei (2023) assert that most community development programs aim to improve the lives of the residents in a particular community in various ways. According to the author, a typical example is one that assists individuals in acquiring the competencies required to enter the workforce. According to Newell (2005), many community members are unemployed, and when such programs are started, the outcome is frequently an increase in the number of employed community members. Better economic development and the attraction of firms to the town can result from this.

According to Manggat et al. (2018), development can raise the rural community's citizens' level of living. The writers contend that human growth ought to focus on enhancing people's quality of life, specifically on fostering independence in each person. It can't be limited to the provision of tangible facilities like electricity and water. The author continues by saying that progress begins with a reduction in poverty and ends with its eradication from society. According to Warburton (2018), development should take into account the needs of underprivileged communities, whose members must actively engage in projects that will advance local development.

Corporate community involvement

One way that businesses and organizations help their local communities is through corporate community involvement. The writers go on to say that fostering positive relationships between the participating communities and the firm is the foundation of CCI. Oates et al. (2024) claim that there is insufficient research on the use of CCI programs to gauge community involvement in development initiatives. According to the author, organizations cannot project a positive image if they just decide what is best for the local community. Instead, the community should actively participate in choosing projects that will further the town's growth. Haldane et al. (2019) refer to community participation as mechanism which allows the local community as a stakeholder to participate in programmes targeted for them.

As local communities are seen as essential stakeholders in business, corporate community involvement is growing in significance (Cranmer et al., 2023; Mella and Gazzola, 2018). This recognition results from corporations now playing a more socially responsible role in the community as citizens (Haldane et al., 2019). The local community expects businesses to participate in development projects that will alter society. Corporate involvement in the society has changed; companies are now more involved in corporate social investments than in charitable giving. According to Muthuri (2018), businesses are selflessly giving to the community without expecting anything in return. Mella and Gazzola (2018) assert that the contributions of businesses/organisations to community are inspired by the profit they realise in doing business in the community. Corporate community involvement can contribute greatly to community development (Alatawi et al., 2023).

Empowering rural people through capacity building

It will be challenging to accomplish effective rural development unless capacity training is planned for beneficiaries and stakeholders who have direct management authority. (Ika and Donnelly, 2017; Ekemezie and Digitemie, 2024) Developing capacity should be a part of any development that aims to be successful, efficient, and support from the bottom up. Building people's capability and making them efficient and effective will help them identify issues they face regardless of the community in which they reside and will also assist them in achieving positive development

goals.

One way to empower people, organizations, and communities to manage development initiatives effectively and efficiently is through capacity building. According to Ika and Pinto (2023), there may be situations in which certain stakeholders or beneficiaries lack the necessary knowledge to manage resources, fully participate in decision-making, or even have an impact on policy or make adjustments that could result in revisions to development programs that would improve viable and sustainable livelihood activities (Xaba et al., 2024). However, the acquisition of skills and knowledge would not only help people to perform creditably but, they also form the basis of day-to-day management skills needed in community improvement. Lack of capacity building could lead to ineffective performance and poor results.

Culture and sustainability

Our culture defines who we are and how we perceive the world (Alsheddi, 2018). The only way to guarantee a development that is human-centered, inclusive, and egalitarian is to place culture at the center of development strategies. The international development agenda refers to culture for the first time within the scope of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were endorsed by the United Nations in September 2015. UNESCO has praised this as "an unparalleled recognition." In addition to being a goal in and of itself, preserving and advancing culture also directly advances several SDGs, including those pertaining to the environment, gender equality, safe and sustainable cities, decent work and economic growth, decreased inequality, and peaceful and inclusive societies. The development goals are implemented effectively and with cultural awareness to reap the indirect benefits of culture.

Adanlawo (2017) prescribes four main conceptual threads that emerged to position culture within 'culture and sustainability' discourses related to local development: (1) culture as capital; (2) culture as process and way of life, interacting with an environment; (3) culture as a central binding element providing the values underlying sustainable (or unsustainable) actions; and (4) culture as creative expression providing insights on environmental/sustainability concerns. This paper is peculiar on culture as process and way of life, interacting with an environment.

The articles examine culture as a process and a way of life from a variety of perspectives, usually entwining with the idea of cultural citizenship. According to Venter (2023), cultural citizenship is the collection of abilities that enable civic engagement and the exercise of citizen rights. This idea may be helpful in examining how community capacity-building tactics and cultural engagement in the community intersect. They also make the point that community development can only be sustainable if members of a diverse resident population are able to come together to experience each other's cultures in a variety of ways and settings. It will be required to ensure sustainability – both in the natural world and in human societies.

Communities, according to Saleh and Brem (2023), are socially and culturally produced locations that are embodied and represented in their physical forms and spaces, the living patterns that occur there, and the innovations and creative forms that these settings foster. The writers place a strong emphasis on truly participatory, "bottom-up" projects, activities, and processes that are encouraged as iterative contributions towards long-term growth in their visions of more sustainable communities. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a paradigm change in development theory that goes beyond economic growth and envisions a desirable, inclusive, peaceful, equitable, and environmentally sustainable future. This bold vision demands creative approaches, beyond the typical linear and sectoral ones that most countries have been used to in recent decades.

Culture and creativity have a transversal impact on each of the three pillars of sustainable development—economic, social, and environmental—if the SDGs are organized around these aims. In turn, the environmental, social, and economic facets of sustainable development support the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of creativity. Creativity and cultural heritage, both material and immaterial, are resources that must be safeguarded and carefully maintained. When culture-forward solutions can guarantee the success of interventions to accomplish the SDGs, they can act as both drivers and facilitators for the achievement of the goals.

Challenges associated with culture

Language Barriers

Communication is integral in building connections and fostering understanding (Barneto, 2024). Communication difficulties caused by language constraints can make it challenging to establish a connection with the community. Nkomo and Adanlawo (2024) suggest the following methods for getting beyond linguistic obstacles:

- Learn basic phrases and greetings in the local language to show respect and build rapport.
- Utilize translation tools or apps to facilitate communication.
- Engage the assistance of local translators or language interpreters when necessary.

Cultural Differences

Cultural differences can impact interactions, decision-making processes, and perceptions. Without proper management, these differences can lead to misunderstandings and clashes.

Adanlawo et al. (2021) suggest few ways to manage cultural differences effectively:
- Foster an environment of open-mindedness and inclusivity, allowing for the celebration of diversity and the exploration of different perspectives.
- Encourage dialogue and active listening to understand and appreciate cultural differences.
- Seek the guidance of local community leaders or mentors who can provide insights into cultural norms and practices.

Strategies to address cultural obstacles

Promoting Cultural Awareness

Understanding and appreciating diverse customs, traditions, and lifestyles are greatly aided by cultural awareness (Saaida, 2023). It fosters empathy and respect for other cultures in people, which can result in a more cohesive and inclusive society. In today's globalized society, where encounters between people from different origins are becoming more frequent and vital, it is imperative to promote cultural understanding. To encourage cultural awareness, try these three strategies:

Education and Cultural Exchange Programs

Education is an effective tool for promoting cultural awareness. Cultural exchange programs provide opportunities for government agencies officials to interact with rural community members from different backgrounds. By exposing the officials to different ways of life, cultural exchange programs help cultivate tolerance, understanding, and respect for diverse cultures.

Engaging with Local Communities

Interacting with nearby communities is yet another effective strategy for increasing cultural sensitivity. This can be achieved by planning celebrations of diversity and community involvement events and activities. Food fairs, festivals, and cultural exhibits are all great examples of gathering places where people can learn about and celebrate various cultures. People can obtain firsthand knowledge and form deep connections with people from diverse cultures by actively engaging in these activities.

Developing Language Skills

A key component of culture, language also has a big impact on raising cultural awareness. Acquiring proficiency in a foreign language not only facilitates efficient communication but also offers valuable perspectives into the principles, convictions, and subtle cultural aspects of a particular group (Fenuku, 2024). Learning a new language helps people connect and communicate more meaningfully with people from that culture while also providing them with a greater understanding of that culture.
This is an ongoing process that requires open-mindedness, willingness to learn, and active engagement. By incorporating education and cultural exchange programs, engaging with local communities, and developing language skills, individuals can contribute to a more inclusive and culturally rich society (Khasinah, 2024).

Strengthening Social Cohesion

People from various backgrounds can come together through cross-cultural experiences, which promotes social cohesiveness within a community. People from different cultures get to know and respect one another better when they work together and interact. Members of the community are then better able to develop empathy, trust, and a sense of belonging as a result. Cross-cultural interactions foster a peaceful atmosphere that fosters cooperation and collaboration by enhancing social cohesion (Khasinah, 2024).

Conclusions

To ensure that community's agenda is prioritised rather than either our organization's or our own, we must be perpetually vigilant to the hegemony of our (or the agency's) worldview and values. Cultural humility compels us to repeatedly remind ourselves that although we may be able to offer perspectives, information, and options of which our clients may not be aware, only the client ultimately knows what is best for them. Cultural humility entrusts us to diligently investigate every facet of our professional demeanour that could potentially obstruct our clients' feeling of self-determination and sense of worth and respect. We are obligated to impose our ethnocentric ideals on our clients, encouraging them to be more "like us," whether consciously or unconsciously, if we do not engage in continuous, compassionate self-reflection upon our own identity landscape, the social contexts we and our clients inhabit, and the values and beliefs that accompany those contexts.

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