

An Application of Asset Based Community Development Approach: A Case Study from Rural Community in Egypt

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Abstract

Many communities in Egypt, specifically the rural areas, are unquestionably distressed places as a result of the major economic and political shifts that have occurred over the past few years. Strategies of community development are currently viewed as the radical remedy for poverty related problems. In Egypt, community development strategies are usually driven from traditional approaches including charity, needs and rights based approaches which focus on basic needs like shelters and food. These approaches have proved a deficiency orientation as they ignore the structural causes of poverty and address symptoms only. In response to these shortages came an alternative capacity focused practice called asset based community development (ABCD) approach. The case in this research is that ABCD could offer a coherent strategy of sustainable development in poor communities in Egypt. Based on that, the main objectives of the research is to study the application of ABCD approach in rural areas, and in turn present a customized ABCD approach derived from the international guidelines and the Egyptian experience. In order to fulfill these objectives, case studies from the rural communities in Egypt that adopts ABCD approach were extensively studied mostly through qualitative research methods. The analysis and the findings of the current research are most relevant to developing countries and to those emerging from state capitalism and centrally planned economies. The results of the research give substantial contribution in understanding and identifying the ABCD approach. Thus, a possible way is paved to generalize this bottom up development strategy over poor communities.

Keywords: Asset based, community development, rural communities, developing countries, Egypt

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Introduction

Many communities in Egypt, specifically the rural areas, are unquestionably distressed and poor places as a result of the major economic and political shifts that have occurred over the past few years. According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS)¹, Egypt's poverty rate has increased, reaching 26.3% for the year 2013 compared with 25.2% in 2011. However, a lot of other inveterate factors can contribute enormously to this statement including isolation, unemployment, lack of education and deteriorated health services. Poverty is continuously increasing, particularly in rural areas of Upper Egypt. Although poverty exists in all governorates, the incidence of poverty in urban governorates, such as Cairo, Giza and Alexandria, is minimal when compared to the rural ones. Poverty rates in rural areas constitute 42% of the total Egyptian population in comparison to 7% in urban cities (El-Tawila et al, 2013). One of the main differences between rural and urban Egypt is access to public infrastructure. Inhabitants of rural areas, unlike their urban peers, rarely have access to electricity, water or sewage system (Nagi, 2001). Even within rural areas, poverty rate differ from one governorate to another; rural areas of Upper Egypt are much more impoverished than in Lower Egypt. For instance, three governorates in Upper Egypt - Assiut, Al-Minya and Suhaj - have 794 villages where impoverished people constitute 82% of the total number of poor people in the countryside (CAPMAS, 2012).

Many solutions have been proposed to eradicate poverty according to different causes and consequences of poverty. Adams and Page (2003) stated that solving societal problems especially those pertained to education and medical care could mitigate poverty related problems. While Olivares and Santos (2009) argued that launching small enterprises, and supplying the poor with loans and planned frameworks could serve as a feasible solution for poverty. Some countries provide monthly allowance to fresh graduates and unemployed citizens as an attempt to protect them from poverty. And others suggested that poverty could be diminished through decreasing the wages gap, providing food security and eradicating illiteracy (Fahmy, 2004). Nevertheless, most of the solutions embrace one or more concepts of community development approaches. Therefore, strategies of community development are currently viewed as the radical and proper remedy for poverty related problems.

The community development field emerged with the goal of addressing and alleviating poverty in low-income and minority communities around the world. This goal was set up upon the realization of the strong relation between poverty and underdevelopment (Vidal, 1997). Community development involves several processes where community members come together and take collaborative actions to achieve economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the community (Buckley, 1999). Consequently, these collective actions exert positive feedback on poverty reduction (Ndirangu et al, 2007). Since spending on the poor is not only equity enhancing but promotes development and economic growth as well, various approaches of community development have been emerged and are continuously changing to palliate poverty related problems (fig.1). Eradication of poverty and community development became more interdependent goals after they were

¹ CAPMAS is the official statistical agency of Egypt that collects, processes, analyzes, and disseminates all statistical data and the Census.

highlighted by United Nations (UN, 2000) as goals number one and eight respectively in the millennium development goals (MDGs)² (Khadka, 2012). As a result, the concept of community development in accordance with the concept of poverty became intertwined and passed through various stages of remodeling.

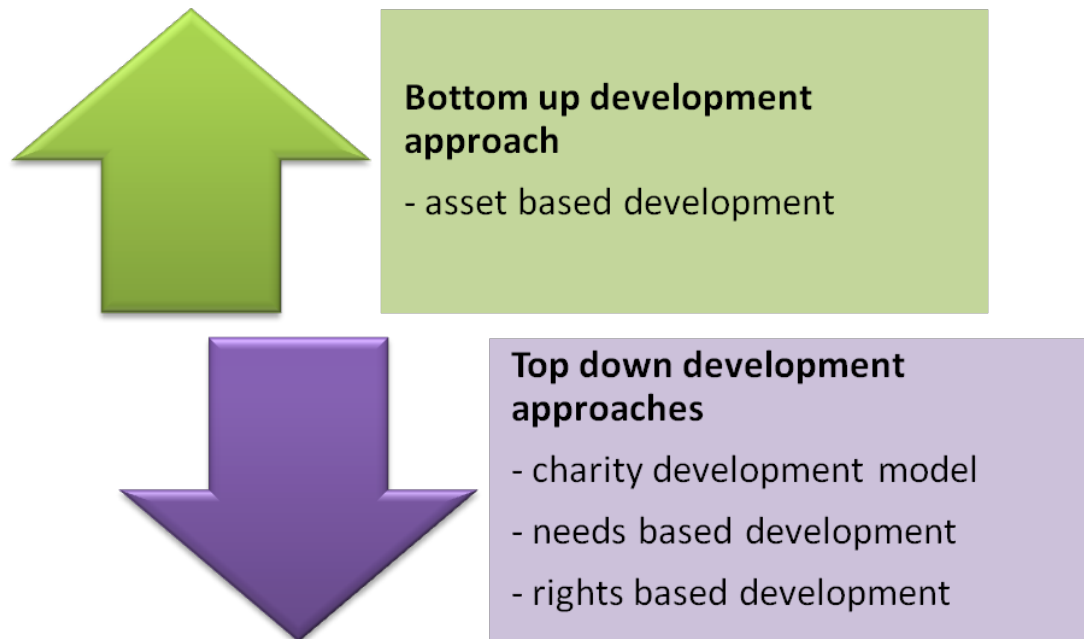


Figure 1: Different approaches of community development

Most of the traditional approaches to development are externally-focused mechanisms that have been adopted extensively to eradicate poverty and accomplish the MDGs. The implications of such approaches cannot be discounted; nevertheless, it is associated with some limitations which hinder its ability to address policies and regulations that could make radical change (Uvin, 2007). Long term problems like poverty cannot be solved by such approaches alone, and can often be exacerbated by the influx of external resources. The strategy of traditional approaches views the community as a set of needs and problems. This forces the community leaders to distort the shape of their communities, highlight problems and deficiencies, and hide capacities and strengths. Leaders are acknowledged on how many resources are attracted to the community, not on how self-reliant the community has become (Marglin, 2008). This strategy denies the basic community wisdom, discourages people from participating in higher community development level, and community members start to feel powerless, and see themselves as people with special needs that can only met by outsiders. In other words, they convert to be clients rather than citizen (Keeble and Meisel, 2006). Furthermore, focusing on resources based on needs or rights directs the benefits to suppliers rather than the needy community members (McKnight and Kretzmann, 1997).

Traditional approaches generally require outside expertise, funding and resources which ensure the local perception that only outside experts can provide real help and are capable of solving their problems. They also create a wall between lower income

² The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight international development goals that were established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, and aim to eradicate poverty, combat diseases, and achieve education and gender equality.

communities and the rest of society; make local groups deal more with external parties than with individuals in their own communities, and eventually weaken the social bond within communities (Roehlkepartain, 2005). Reliance upon needs identification as the solely way to determine the deserved community could be destructive to community well-being; it ensures endless cycle of dependence as problems must be worse than the previous year for the fund to be renewed. Further, the way of determination of the deserved community is questionable. It is corrupted with subjectivity because outsiders are responsible to judge the importance of certain community needs which they are not fully aware of them (Keeble, 2006). Traditional strategy can guarantee only survival, but can never lead to serious change or community development as it keeps the image of the philanthropic and the needy, and the needs of the poor are only met when resources are available (Boyd et al, 2008).

In response to these excessively shortage based methodologies came an alternative capacity focused practice called asset based community development approach. Asset Based Community Development approach (ABCD) has attracted the attention of community development academics and practitioners as an alternative strategy for development in urban and rural communities. It was created by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann at the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University, in 1993. They outlined an alternative approach to the externally-focused approaches used by governments and international organizations to develop poor communities (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). ABCD is a bottom-up development strategy that conveys a set of approaches for sustainable development of communities. Asset based approaches recognize and build on a combination of the human, social and physical capital that exists within local communities. They offer a set of concepts for identifying and enhancing the protective factors which help individuals and communities maintain and enhance their public value even when faced with adverse life circumstances. Asset based approaches can complement public services and traditional methods for improving and creating public value (McKnight and Kretzmann, 1993). As an approach to development, it depends on the principle that the recognition of qualities, natural resources, gifts and assets of members and communities is more accepted to motivate constructive activity for change than a single concentration on needs, deficiencies and problems. Seeing the glass half-full and half empty is not to deny the real deficits that a community confronts, than to stimulate a positive charge on how every single part has a value, and can contribute in significant approaches to community development (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003).

Following this approach is a set of methods, called ABCD process (fig.2), that have been used as a platform to compile beginners communities around common framework, to facilitate communication as well as sorting some ideas on mapping the capabilities of the community (Boyd et al, 2008).



Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the steps of ABCD process as defined by McKnight and Kretzmann

The ABCD process could be conceptualized as a strategy for sustainable community driven development. Accordingly, the united nation assembly is preparing to issue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³, which will build upon the MDGs to help in driving the implementation of sustainable development. The proposal covers a broad range of sustainable development issues including ending poverty and hunger, improving health and education and making cities more sustainable (Ferreira, 2012). ABCD is quite known among developmental organizations in Egypt; nevertheless, it is not incorporated in their development activities. Several international and national development organizations such as COSPE Egypt⁴ and CDS⁵ employ ABCD term and its equivalent concepts of sustainability, empowerment and participation on their websites. Despite this, their development programs utilize the traditional approaches to development and very few organizations adopt ABCD approach.

³ One of the main outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference was the agreement by United Nations to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

⁴ COSPE Egypt is part of COSPE, an international non-profit organization founded in Italy in 1983 operating in the field of international cooperation development and human rights.

<http://www.cospe-egypt.org/about-cospe-egypt>

⁵ The Center for Development Services (CDS) is an employee-owned development entrepreneurial venture that uses innovative approaches to mobilize technical and financial support for development endeavors in Egypt and the Middle East. <http://www.cds-mena.org/site/index.php>

Research objectives

The case in this research is that ABCD could offer a coherent strategy of innovative and sustainable development practice in local and poor communities in Egypt. Based on that, the main objectives of the research is to comprehensively study the application of ABCD approach in rural areas, and in turn determine whether it is possible to replicate the approach in similar communities or not. Moreover, the research aims to present a customized ABCD approach to Egypt derived from the international guidelines of ABCD and the Egyptian ABCD experience. Thus, a possible way is paved to generalize this bottom up development strategy all over distressed communities in Egypt. Another purpose for this research is to fill in the gap that was found in the literature about studying and documentation of community development approaches in Egypt and about the scarcity of English language research. Filling in these gaps will prevent the recurrent incidence of previous mistakes, highlight the learned lesson of the preceding trials, form data base for community development work, and will give a chance for future community developers to build upon former experiences.

Research Methodology

The research was designed to explore the processes, outcomes, and faced challenges of asset based development approach in the rural communities. Hence, a new era could be established to sustainable development. The Egyptian Society for Endogenous Development (ESED)⁶ -a non-governmental organization that adopts ABCD approach in community development projects- was chosen to achieve the research objectives. As ABCD approach is considered to be a collective social behavior, data gathering depended mainly on qualitative research methods. The methods used typically focused on meanings, views, and perceptions, where participants' description of their situation is highly valued.

Purposive sampling strategy was pursued in choosing the participants; preliminary criteria relevant to the research objectives were predetermined to guide the selection process. The selection criteria enclosed: all participants should have at least three years experience and should be currently working in community development field, the ratio between pioneers and novices should be 1:1, and diversity in educational background, social level, and affiliated sector should be taken into consideration as much as possible. The participants' number was not fixed prior to data collection, and the number of interviews was determined during the collection process on the basis of theoretical saturation.

Nine in-depth interviews were conducted with both community developers and beneficiaries of development programs. Community developers working in private, governmental and NGOs sectors were interviewed. Moreover, the interviewed participants were of different demographics and diverse backgrounds (table 1).

Moreover, a focus group discussion was conducted with the community developers of The ESED. This variation is valuable as it allows triangulation and ensures validity and reliability of data. Interviews questions were designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the ABCD approach and the current status of

⁶ The Egyptian Society for Endogenous Development website: <http://www.egy-com.org/>

community development in Egypt. The questions were prospectively semi structured to let interviewees talk freely, and probing questions were asked if the discussion skewed to unneeded direction. All interviews and the focus group discussion were held after the IRB⁷ approval (fig 3), and were based at the location of the interviewees either in Cairo or in Al-Minya. The interviews were communicated in Arabic, then translated, analyzed and interpreted in English by myself. Before conducting the interviews, all participants were informed about the research through the informed consent (fig 4).

Additionally, a case study approach guided the documentation of the research objectives. Al-Kayat is located at Upper Egypt, Shamma at the west and Kafr Al-Arab is located in Lower Egypt; this gave insights about application of ABCD approach in different cultures and contexts. This variation was intended to extrapolate the finding to a lot of number of communities as much as possible; however, more research is essential for generalization of the data. The analysis and the findings of the current research are most relevant to developing countries and to those emerging from capitalism, political instability and centralization such as Egypt.

⁷ An institutional review board (IRB), is a committee that has been formally designated to approve, monitor, and review biomedical and behavioral research involving humans.



To: Alyaa Farouk Ahmed Hessin
Cc: Mariez Wasfi
From: Atta Gebril, Chair of the IRB
Date: Nov 9 , 2014
Re: Approval of study

This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled "An application of asset based community development approach: a case study from rural community in Egypt," and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" heading. As you are aware, the members of the IRB suggested certain revisions to the original proposal, but your new version addresses these concerns successfully. The revised proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor, Dr. Amr Salama. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.

This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Atta Gebril".

Dr. Atta Gebril
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A logo consisting of a yellow square on the left and a dark blue rectangle on the right.

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Figure 3: The IRB approval

Documentation of Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study

Project Title: *An application of asset based community development approach: a case study from rural community in Egypt*

Principal Investigator: *Alyaa Farouk Ahmed Hessin, 01001347903, alyaafh@aucegypt.edu*

*You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the research is to extensively study the asset based community development approach in the Egyptian context. Thus, a possible way could be paved to generalize this bottom up development strategy all over distressed communities in Egypt, and the findings may be published, presented, or both. The expected duration of your participation is three days.

The procedures of the research will be as follows Asset based community development is a set of approaches for sustainable development of communities. They are based on the concept of building on what communities have, focusing on the positives and strengths, and regardless of the extent of poverty of these communities have. This statement provides a sense of security to the poor and marginalized communities in Egypt.

Based on that, the ABCD approach needs to be extensively studied in the Egyptian context. Thus, a possible way could be paved to generalize this bottom up development strategy all over distressed communities in Egypt. The current research aims to: deeply understand the implementation of ABCD approach in the Egyptian environment; address the suitable ABCD tools for the Egyptian culture that used to identify and mobilize community assets; analyze all negative and positive aspects and challenges of ABCD methodology; and to develop a practical guide for future applications of ABCD approach in Egypt.

This research will help a lot in understanding and identifying the ABCD approach in Egyptian communities. It will disclose different ways of exploring and mobilizing community assets, and will serve to develop a directory for further implementation of sustainable community development approach ABCD approach in Egypt.

*There will not be certain risks or discomforts associated with this research.

*There will be benefits to you from this research. Potential benefits to participants could be summarized in the possibility of replicating their experience in other communities, documenting their trials, and exposure to international experiences.

*The information you provide for purposes of this research is confidential. All interviews recording and handouts will be kept confidential, and the data will be analyzed and interpreted by myself in a way that informants will not be identified.

* Questions about the research, my rights, or research-related issues should be directed to (Alyaa Farouk Ahmed Hessin) at (01001347903).

*Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Figure 4: The informed consent

Table 1: Data about the participants to the interviews and the focus group discussion

Code	Status (community developer/ beneficiary)	Demography	Years of experience	Pioneer/ novice	Educational background	Working sector
IDI01	Community developer	Urban	6	P	Engineering	NGO
IDI02	Community developer	Urban	4	N	Engineering	NGO
IDI03	Community developer	Urban	8	P	Business	NGO
FGD4	Community developer	Urban	3	N	Vocational	NGO
	Community developer	Rural	7	P	Engineering	NGO
	Community developer	Rural	6	P	Business	NGO
	Community developer	Urban	3	N	Business	NGO
	Community developer	Urban	4	N	Business	NGO
IDI5	Beneficiary & community developer	Rural	15	P	Islamic studies	Private
IDI6	Beneficiary & community developer	Rural	5	N	Islamic studies	Public
IDI8	Beneficiary	Rural	4	N	Vocational	NGO
IDI9	Beneficiary	Rural	6	P	Vocational	NGO
IDI10	Community developer	Urban	4	N	Pharmacy	Private
IDI11	Community developer	Urban	10	P	Engineering	Public

Findings and Discussion

The research discloses that the process of ESED composed of well defined six steps (fig 5); however, it changes slightly from one project to another according to the circumstances of the community.



Figure 5: Conceptual framework to the steps of the Egyptian approach to development in rural communities of Egypt

Step 1: Determination of the location

Determination of the location differs from one project to another. For instance, reports from international organizations like United Nations and World Bank about poor villages in Egypt usually act as a solid guide in the selection process. Sometimes ESED conducts a comprehensive field study to select the village, and in other cases the village is offered as a part of other company social corporate responsibility. Three conditions should be existed in each village to be selected. The village should be poor, contains assets, and accessible. Poverty and assets availability are two consistent factors that cannot be separated. If the village is poor and has no assets, the project will have nothing to build upon and cannot be operated. Vice versa, if the village is not poor and has assets then the core value for the development and poverty eradication is lost and no need for the project.

Step 2: Exploring community assets

Discovering community assets could be subdivided into two successive stages. Stage one encompasses selection of the team members (team no.1). The members should be from diverse backgrounds and professions. Social, administrative, technical and psychological skills should be represented within the team. Furthermore, they should be reputable, and have former experience in community development projects. All team members settle in the community for months (determined according to the nature and complexity of the project but usually not less than three months); as they

try to join the villagers in their daily activities. Creating a robust relation between the team and the villagers will transfer the process organically to stage two which involves conducting a comprehensive field study. The principal objective of this study is to identify all the natural, physical and social assets that could be mobilized; in line with, understanding the power relations and gender sensitive issues, and realizing norms, culture and key personnel within the community. Usually, the team begins with formal visits to the community leaders to introduce the project then continued with storytelling tool to elicit the needed information from community members.

Step 3: Preparation for mobilization of assets

This step is a transition state between the idea of the project and its actual implementation; it includes three phases that could be done in different order according to the requirements of the project. It usually starts with conducting scientific research; in which community developers integrate their technical and scientific backgrounds to turn the neglected community assets into profitable resource. After reaching a satisfactory point in the scientific research phase, the planning phase starts. The planning phase embraces doing a detailed feasibility study and a generic project plan, which identify the time plan, financial plan, resource plan and the benefit risk ratio of the project. A communication plan, that determines various entities and institutions that would help in the execution of the project, usually follows the project plan.

The final phase in step 3 involves formation of team no.2 and steering committee of the project. Members of team no.2 are community developers selected from the ESED; and their role is to ensure the implementation of the project and the compliance to the plan. They are not only responsible for facilitating day to day activities and overcoming problems, but also building trust and social relations with the community members. Selection of the steering committee members is also done in this phase. It is composed of individuals from the community, which were previously recognized by ESED members as natural leaders. They are individuals who have strong passion about the cause, appreciated status among villagers and have good reputation. They are insiders; therefore, they are able to successfully lead and open the way for team no.2 throughout the project.

Step 4: Implementation of assets mobilization

Mobilization of community assets composed of several activities. First of all, the technology that was done in the labs is transferred to the community. However, it is not blindly transferred without modifications; instead, it is customized to suit the village circumstances and the villagers' skills. This involves replacement of sophisticated devices with simple instrument that community members can readily operate, and taking into consideration the environmental conditions of the village (fig.6). A pilot experiment is then done, and the final product is subjected to certain tests to ensure compliance with the quality standards and its validation.

After meeting the requirements, a training program is given to the villagers to familiarize them with the process, instructions and the instruments. Ultimately, the project progresses to large scale production. In certain projects, female villagers played a successful role in actuating the project and controlling the turnover problem.



Figure 6: Examples to the simplified devices that are used at Al-Kayat village

Step 5: Empowering the community

This step involves finding an entity to take over the project. The objective of this step is to ensure the sustainability of the project through proper management of community members. It begins when ESED members observe that their domination over the project become unnecessary for its existence. The interpretation of the observation differs from one project to another according to the surrounding circumstances of the community. In certain cases, a grass root organization, which is already exist, manage the project and exploit it revenues in performing its charity activities.

Step 6: Independence of the project

Certain proceedings are performed to prepare for leaving the community; an agreement that shapes the future communications between the community and ESED is settled. This conveys that part of the project revenues will be used by ESED for further development projects, and a representative of ESED will be a member in the project association that will be established at the end of the project.

Each step in both processes (ESED and McKnight) was carefully scrutinized for its activities and objectives. Although little differences exist in the terminology and the order of the steps, numerous similarities have been realized in the contents of each step and the undertaken activities. As Kretzmann and McKnight process is global, it concentrates more on the conceptual frame work upon which ABCD approach is operated, and less on the practical steps that should be implemented. The research uncovered no evidence that the involved community developers have learned about ABCD approach; nevertheless, ESED development process addresses the two aspects carefully. It highlights the conceptual framework of ABCD approach and the functional steps efficiently. Moreover, it gives additional insights for location determination and the post mobilization stage. Therefore, the aforementioned discussion reveals that ABCD approach to development is conducted and could be adopted in rural communities of Egypt.

ABCD outcomes in rural communities of Egypt

Implementation of the ABCD approach leads to mobilizing natural and physical assets. This affects positively the economy of the community, and the wellbeing of its members. ABCD approach does not seek external help; it depends on utilizing the resources and positive aspects within the community to achieve sustainable economic development (Pinkett, 2000). The concept of development of the local economy is extensively utilized in the studied rural communities of Egypt. Al-Kayat village has 25,000 palms which naturally produce dates and palm fronds. In Shammas village, utilizing ABCD approach changed the non edible fig to delicious jam that was locally exported. The products of the projects are sold, and the revenues are used to improve community services including infrastructure, education, healthcare or any needs. This simple process activates economic self-reliance of community members, and creates sustainable local economy for the marginalized communities. ABCD, as a strategy for sustainable economic development, makes communities less dependent on the state economy and the government services.

Another outcome that was realized from adopting ABCD approach is generating numerous job opportunities. According to world development report (2013), development happens through jobs. Creating job opportunities is capable of decreasing the unemployment rate which in turn, increases the productivity and fortifies the local economy of the community. Job vacancies decreases crime rate, immigration rate and psychological disturbances associated with unemployment. The natural assets of the community are sustainable; therefore, the opportunities created through adopting ABCD approach is sustainable ones. Stabilized jobs provide regular income that can enhance living standards of the workers and give better access to education and healthcare services.

The importance of social cohesion in any community development work cannot be overstated; it can inevitably lead to success or failure of the project (Perkins et al, 2004). Due to its tribal structure, rural communities in Egypt suffer from social conflict and in some cases religious conflict. Moreover, political conflict has been arisen due to the current political instability. ABCD approach depends on the assets of community members so they feel that externals have nothing to give them; instead, they only help them to exploit their assets. Adopting ABCD approach connects the interests of community members; it enables them to have a common background and unifies them around a shared vision. Moreover, it leads to establish new networks of relationships between conflicted parties. For instance, the steering committee of Al-Kayat project contains members from disputed families, yet they agree on supporting the project and find a way to communicate with each other successfully. Hence, ABCD approach is able to strengthen and extend networks of relationships, and in turn, foster social cohesion in rural communities of Egypt.

A central theme of ABCD approach is the relocation of power to communities (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003), this was obviously recognized in the studied rural communities of Egypt. Empowerment of community members was not only realized from their speeches, but also appeared through their body language and facial expressions.

ABCD approach achieves empowerment through awareness, participation and capacity building of community members. Informing community members about their assets puts aside the idea of 'philanthropic and needy' that is associated with other development approaches. Community members have a feeling of richness and enhanced self esteem. Awareness also decreases the reliance on external agencies and eliminates the concept of 'only outsiders can help'. Moreover, the active participation of community members in all the steps of ABCD process, increase the self confidence and resident involvement. Empowerment of community members through ABCD approach turns them from clients to citizens.

Challenges of ABCD in rural communities of Egypt

Asset based approach holds a great promise to achieve development in distressed communities of Egypt. However, its actual implementation encompasses numerous challenges that would need further research as ABCD initiatives are done in the future. The challenges appeared gives useful insights about the common challenges that could face ABCD approach in rural communities of Egypt.

Lack of trust is one of the major challenges that encounter ABCD approach in rural communities. This returns to the fact that members of these communities have been deceived several times by externals, who tend to use the human and natural resources for their own interests, and never consider community interests. Exploring of community assets is done through casual discussions between community members and community developers. Lack of trust hinders the occurrence of this effective communication, and could eventually lead to termination of the project if not overcome.

Culture difference is another challenge that faces ABCD approach. It refers to a set of behaviors, habits, roles, traditions and norms that apply to a particular community. Each village in Egypt has its unique culture that could be completely different from the neighboring village. The success of a development project in a certain community does not refer to its spontaneous success in different communities. Understanding the culture of the community before implementing ABCD approach to development is crucial to achieve development. Moreover, inefficient interpretation to the culture within the community inevitably leads to failure of the project. Understanding the culture is an ongoing process that starts with step one and continues throughout the ABCD process. However, team no.2 often takes over the responsibility of understanding the community culture and in turn adapting the steps of ABCD process to perfectly fit in the culture.

Most of rural communities in Egypt suffer from social conflict. Reasons for social conflict differ from one area to another. For instance, rural communities in Upper Egypt contain religious conflict while rural communities in Lower Egypt experience political conflict. In addition, the tribal structure of rural communities in the West is the reason behind the social conflict. Regardless of the reason, ABCD approach cannot function in social conflict. Conflict is associated with disruption of power, and ABCD approach need the collective power of all community members to achieve development. Resolving the original cause of the social conflict is impossible. Instead, creating a common objective upon which community members agree is the path to unify the warring parties.

The idea of endogenous development is an alien concept to the members of rural communities. Community members tend to act as passive consumers in development projects. Development concept for them is all about gaining some services from the outsiders without minimal participation. Here is the challenge; community developers should modulate the concept of development from passive clients to active citizens. Moreover, the involvement of the community developers should be thoughtful to avoid induction of dependency.

Reasons for success

While studying the implementation of ABCD approach in rural communities of Egypt, certain factors have been realized for its great contribution in the success of the approach. Utilization of storytelling tool could be considered a factor for success of ABCD approach in rural communities of Egypt. It is based on concluding the community needs from the stories narrated by community members. In ABCD approach, it is conducted to know about the physical, natural and human assets of the community. In addition, it creates a friendly environment between community developers and community members, and facilitates the social acceptability of the project.

The characteristics of community developers who employ ABCD approach in rural communities of Egypt are a major factor for success. All of them have a passion to implement concrete achievements and a great sense of responsibility towards distressed communities in Egypt. They work in a horizontal hierarchy with team spirit, and conduct weekly meetings to discuss the status of the projects. Moreover, they never share their personal, religious or political views among the community members. Community developers try to be objective as much as possible and always envision endogenous development as their ultimate goal.

Certain considerations should be kept in mind to achieve success of ABCD approach in rural communities of Egypt. First, community developers are very careful about power relations; they always start to conduct meetings with community leader before members. They are fully oriented with gender sensitive issues among different communities. Second, community developers incorporate the key personnel of the community in the steering committee to ensure their loyalty throughout the project; and in turn, the success of the project. Community developers never initiate a project until previous projects and peers experiences have been carefully examined.

Conclusions

By outlining ABCD process and unpacking its steps and outcomes, the research has served to position ABCD approach as a promising strategy to achieve development and eradicate poverty in rural communities of Egypt. In accordance with that, the research highlighted few limitations to ABCD approach that should be considered when applying in similar settings. The asset based approach to development builds upon strengths and resources that already exist within a community. Therefore, an extremely poor community with no assets cannot embrace ABCD approach. Moreover, creating a strong relationship between community developers and community members is one of the main pillars upon which ABCD process is employed. This could lead to personalization of projects in some cases; and community members refuse to facilitate the process except in the presence of certain community developers whom they trust. Despite the fact that ABCD approach aims to

reduce the level of external dependency that is associated with other approaches, it still depends on outsiders help to undertake the development initiative. Overdone involvement of outsiders could lead to external reliance in some cases. In addition, sustainable development -which is the ultimate goal of ABCD approach- needs external fund to be initiated and long period of time to be maintained.

Despite its limitations, the ABCD approach was proved to be capable of bringing development and alleviate poverty in rural communities of Egypt. It views community as a source of positive energy and of self-sufficiency that can ensure social justice and inclusiveness, and is able to manage changes. However, the efficacy of the ABCD does not only depend on the approach itself, but also on how the organizations, individuals and practitioners incorporate it in communities. Besides, establishing and maintaining social cohesion among community members is fundamental to achieve sustainable development in Egyptian communities. ABCD is a not a “copy and paste” process for community development; it needs customization and could not be imitated blindly from western theories. Therefore, the application of the ABCD approach discussed in this paper will require modification according to the time and context, more research for generalization of the data as well as borrowing ideas from different disciplines to enrich the gaps of the process.

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