

Holistic Community Development: Where Secular and Religious World Intersects

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Abstract: Development of holistic community requires approaches that are directed by evangelical perspectives. This paper aimed to investigate the aspects of holistic community development while arguing the secular and religious perspectives and views. The manuscript also proposed development of holistic community within the organization 'Developing Our World'. Author used Christianity as the missionary statant for the proposed organization. Holistic perspectives of community development are substantially guided by religious views and norms particularly those addressed by the evangelical aspects in Christianity. However, secular views of community development do not view religious perspective as much important. Thus, author used an evangelical missionary statement and holistic perspective to develop potential themes from the collected secondary data in this paper. Five major themes have been devised from the collected secondary data. These include secularism and holistic community development; evangelism and holistic community development; religious foundation and holistic community development; the foundational concepts about holistic community development based on "the great narrative of scriptures"; and the value of applying the concept in the mission field today.

Keywords: Holistic Community, Holistic Community Development, Religion, Secularism, Religion Versus Secularism, Christianity, And Evangelism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Background

The concept of holistic community development is a creative and collaborative process that aims to cultivate the economic, cultural, social, environmental, and political conditions to thrive upon by the entire community (Skrable 2016). A community developer or an outside organization works to begin and sustain the process of holistic community development by creating space for dialogue with the inhabitants of the community. The two-way communication-based dialogue investigates critical questions and helps the community to re-narrate its story in the context of the status quo as well as the forces applied locally and non-locally within the community to sustain the status quo (Singh & Ahmad 2015). With this critical consciousness, the community is empowered and a more equitable, sustainable, just and novel vision emerges within the community that ensures its better future.

Aim of the Paper

The paper aims to provide an overview of the mission and goals of an organization being developed under the title "Developing Our World". The organization is focused on development of holistic community within which, the community members come together in order to take collective actions and generate effective solutions for the common issues of the community. The paper will also analyze the intersecting points between the secular and religious factors and norms that influence the development of a holistic community.

Objectives

The following objectives will be approached to address the research aim and question.

- To analyze the concept of holistic community development
- To investigate the intersecting points of secular and religious beliefs and norms that may influence the holistic community development
- To address the common factors in community wellbeing i.e., physical, spiritual, social, environmental, educational, cultural, athletic, and economic
- To evaluate the collective actions taken by community members in a holistic environment at the grassroots level

Research Question

Main research question in this paper is how does 'Developing Our World' seeks to put holistic community development into practice while evaluating the intersecting plane between secular and religious phenomena?

Rationale

The development of a holistic community requires assessment of different factors that affect the living and wellbeing of community members. The proposed organization, 'Developing Our World', approaches the religious and secular conceptualizations of a holistic community in order to address the common issues in the community (Sampath 2015). Collective actions of community members play a significant role in addressing the issues encountered in the context of community wellbeing. The scope of proposed organization based on holistic community approach could range from small initiatives within a small group or large initiatives that involve broader community. The mission statement of the organization aspires the following verse from bible.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

Theoretical Framework

In its natural essence, community development theory addresses the development of community or an organization grounded in principles of inclusion, empowerment, self-determination, social justice, and collective actions of the community members to resolve the issues. The theoretical framework in this paper aspires to the holistic approaches of community development encompassing secular and religious phenomena (Lovat & Clement 2016). The theoretical structure in this paper implies the religious and secular aspects approached by the community members in their lives as well as their communities, the values they behold, the knowledge and wisdom they share within the community. Community development theory is significantly influenced by religious and secular spaces. In past decade, community development, its aesthetics, and direction involve the integral role of spiritual spaces, secular motives, and the intersecting norms between the two (Kapur 2015). The juncture between the two aspects is therefore crucial to be discussed in addressing the development of holistic community in diverse contexts.

II. CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Holistic Community Development

Gould (2006) reported in his publication the essence of holistic community development where wellness for the collective body was measured in terms of health of community. According to the contemporary definition elaborating the concept of holistic community development, it is recognized as creative and collaborative process which plays a significant role in cultivating the various factors of community wellbeing – enabling the community to thrive (Skrable 2016). An organization aiming to develop with the concept of a holistic community view investigates critical questions and re-

narrates the story of the community to sustain the status quo. Holistic community development addresses the issues of community on the general plane and the organization developed based on this approach identifies the issues of the community member by considering each member as a whole. The mission and vision of a holistic organization hold evangelical foundations and responds to the needs of community as perceived and responded by Christianity (Jun et al., 2015).

In holistic discipleship, the intimate needs of the community members are responded in the ordinary areas of life. Under this concept, the community growth process is identified and responded via relief to sustainability and the areas of non-poor poverty are exposed. Under evangelical concepts, holistic not only stays limited to certain spiritual areas rather implies a concern for the totality of life (Singh & Ahmad 2015).

Theory and Practice of Holistic Community Development

Community development theory recognizes and addresses that maintaining the structures, roles, and processes, which are performing effectively, is vital for the sustainability of the community. The proposed organization 'Developing Our World' aspires the theoretical and practical implications for community development that are holistic in nature i.e., that promote each member of the community and sustain the community wellbeing (Sampath 2015). Community development theory, approaching the principles of holism, accepts the propositions and norms settled under classical conservatism that respect the rules of communal life and cumulative opinions. For efficient practical implication of holistic community development theory, each member of the community is required to participate and contribute in cumulative efforts pertained to promote the wellbeing of community. In approaching implementation of theory-oriented community development, community members are integral factors to the process of evaluation, decision making, participation, provision, and direction setting at each level of the organization (Lovat & Clement 2016).

The synergy created through strong capacities of communities and a holistic community development theory creates the foundations for productive use of external support by various other communities with similar theoretical approaches and aspirations (Kapur 2015). The practical implications further help to manage and plan the livelihood of each community member, guaranteeing that the community acts as the main actor of the developmental process and any additional aid provided to promote the aim of the community leads to improved citizens' welfare (Gilchrist & Taylor 2016).

Secular and Religious World

According to literary evidence, the term secularization refers to increased differentiation and separation of secular spheres in society from religious ones. The distinction between religious and secular worlds originates through the philosophical reasons and thoughts that define the norms, perspectives, and approaches maintained by the individual, a society or community, or within an organization (Kapur 2015). Secularism, its most elementary definition, is nothing more than separation of evangelism and church from the state. This promotes the commitment to neutrality by the state while evaluating the religious matters and in doing so, the community or state is not allowed to favor or disfavor certain beliefs or religions over another (Green & Haines 2015). Contrary to secularism perspectives, religion in its true essence is far more holistic than secularism and promotes affection and hospitality within the community. Supporters of Christianity and evangelism in public life maintain that a range of valuable good is provided by religion and also provide the individuals with a sense of identity and meaning (Gilchrist & Taylor 2016).

The conflicts between the two domains have arisen in the latter decades of 20th century, contesting the boundary between secular and religious spheres in many parts of the world (Green & Haines 2015). Critiques and debates on the supporter and opponents of secularism and religion have increased the ratio of controversies on diversity of issues including legalization of freedom of speech, same-sex marriage, assisted dying, equality issues, and clashes around reproductive rights featured highly on state-oriented agendas. The social theorists of 20th century claim the modernization of the world by perceiving secularism as community development approach and being less influenced and less dependent on religious ideas (Green & Haines 2015).

Major Issues in Community Development

Community development requires assessment of the challenges and issues community may face in the future while approaching either holistic, secular or completely religious aspects (Sampath 2015). The common problems in the community that may arise and affect the community wellbeing can be categorized into five fundamental issues; social, economic, health political, and survival issues (Österinen 2016). These issues have been highlighted and addressed by

seeking reconciliation of the four foundational relationships each person has: a relationship with God, with self, with others and with the rest of the creation. The proposed organization 'Developing Our World' intends to develop a variety of strategic programs and processes that generate solution to common issues identified below.

Social Issues

For the development of a community based on holistic theoretical approach, assessment of the social issues is crucial to prevent the community members from disengaging from the community (Jun et al., 2015). Major social issues that are required to be assessed for holistic community development include inequality, discrimination, racism, violence, transportation, environmental contamination, access to clean drinking water, ethnic conflicts, drug use, and health disparities. Each member of the community must be identified as a 'whole being' for which, all the social issues and challenges must be resolved with holistic conceptualizations. This may lead to satisfaction of social wellbeing of the community and its members (Kalemba 2017).

Economic Issues

While developing an organization approached via holistic community development aspects, economic infrastructure is significantly required to be evaluated as the life and wellbeing of community are greatly affected by economic issues (Singh & Ahmad 2015). Major economic issues that are required to address in community development under a holistic approach include imbalanced socioeconomic statuses, improper allocation of resources, and requirement of catering to the financial needs of community members (Corbett & Fikkert 2014). Developing Our World intends to resolve economic issues by providing small loans to the community members to encourage them initiate their business or for educational financing, establishing and creating small businesses that promote employment, and supporting the rural clinics, schools, and churches by financial aids. Moreover, 'Developing Our World' has structured some strategies to sponsor a child at regular intervals in order to promote education and learning among poor socioeconomic class (DeVol et al., 2011). These resolving strategies for economic issues for the community have aspired from holistic view and evangelical perspectives that address the sustainability of community wellbeing through virtuous efforts. Economic issues significantly affect the nature of community approached by the organization as in cases where investments and funds are received in limited amounts. Thus, community development with a holistic approach requires an overview of diverse factors that may hit the community's agenda and sustainability in the future (McMillin 2018).

Health Issues

Assessment of public health, on the whole, is necessary for holistic community development and addresses equal health parameters for each member of the community. Secular paradigms least address the health-related complications and identify as the drawback of individuals with poor socioeconomic background (Fikkert & Mask 2015). However, religious and holistic views count public health as the most important parameter that affects the sustainability of the community's collective wellbeing. Developing Our World intends to resolve the various health issues community members may encounter in the organization such as in context of special needs children and adults, infection control policies, inaccessibility of community members to treatment and diagnostic services, and sanitation system (Sider 1999). Health of each member of the community is crucial for the sustainability and future of the community, assuring strong foundations of the community that sustain health equality and equity. Developing Our World intends to address community health issues by promoting programs and initiatives that provide medical and dental care accessible to each member, providing services for disabled individuals such as mental health illnesses and long-term conditions patients, and supporting effective sanitation system to supply each member of the community safe and clean drinking water (Kalemba 2017). Also, to sustain the community health issues, awareness of hygiene and sanitation is necessary. Holistic approaches of community development address the application of strategies that promote cleanliness, which has also been promoted and encouraged by Christian community views (Harrison & Mercy 2008).

Political Issues

For the sustainability of the community developed under holistic approach, fair and impartial leadership for the community members is crucial and helps in growth and prosperity of the community. Various political issues have been identified in literature, encountered during community development (Wilkinson 1972). Political issues that are most common in various types of community are corruption, unjust leadership, monetary interests, ethnic disparities induced by

politicians, and policies discriminating one group from another based on their rights and values. Even honest differences in political figures' opinions can result in enormous consequences in the community such as when government is questioned to held responsible for provision of social services to some communities and discriminating against other communities from these social services (MacPhail 2013). Developing Our World intends to resolve these political issues in the approached community with holistic foundations via the promotion of training of community leaders for adaptation of just and fair mechanisms of governance. For this purpose, the organization aspires to develop strategies and programs that substantially promote the social, emotional, mental and physical wellbeing development of the future leaders in the community (Wilkinson 1972). Moreover, establishment of farming and agricultural programs has also been proposed as the objectives of the organization to sustain the traditional practices. Modern-day farming practices are aimed at achieving the three main goals; economic profitability, environmental health, and social equity (DuBois & Hunter-Bowman 2015).

Survival Issues

For a community to thrive and survive, evaluation of survival issues is necessary to prevent the community members from different types of survival challenges. Major challenges that a community may encounter under survival challenges include basic needs fulfillment i.e., food, shelter, and clothing, disaster incidences such as due to natural events of floods and storms, and accessibility to clean and safe food and water (Thomas 2018). To address the issues of survival, Developing Our World intends to resolve them by developing and promoting clothing and shelter provision centers, providing welfare services to the community members by engaging them in disaster relief and providing the disaster affected individual's welfare services. Moreover, the organization also intends to develop a holistic community by providing food and first aid who cannot access it on their own (Österinen 2016). Survival strategies must focus on vulnerable populations substantially such as older individuals, long term illness patients, mental health illness patients, and terminally ill patients. Holistic survival strategies and promotion of welfare services in this context can help the vulnerable community members to strengthen the wellbeing of the community (Gilchrist & Taylor 2016).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative research design has been selected for this paper in order to investigate and address the holistic community development for the development of an organization while assessing the aspects of religious and secular parameters. Qualitative research design addresses the research problem by performing an in-depth analysis of research and applying theoretical paradigms in interpreting the collected findings. Qualitative research design varies on the basis of applied methods of data collection and data analysis. By adopting qualitative data collection strategies, secondary data has been collected in this paper. Qualitative research design provides an opportunity for the researchers to present their own opinions and ideas in interpreting and analyzing the collected data.

Search Strategy

Specific key terms were used to search relevant secondary data. The keywords used by the researcher to access relevant data included *holistic community*, *holistic community development*, *religion*, *secularism*, *religion versus secularism*, *Christianity*, and *evangelism*. The search engine used in this paper was Google Scholar and the Sage database was employed to access the relevant journals, articles, books, and reports addressing similar issues as approached by this paper. Both sources i.e., Google Scholar and Sage database are widely used by researchers due to the wide range of data they provide in the form of journal articles, books, and other peer-reviewed publications. The use of secondary data from these sources ensures reliability and validity of the collected findings. Th the domains of research, electronic search engines are now recognized as the first port of call for the researchers that provide reliable, valid and updated data. Secondary data collected via the mentioned search engines was reviewed multiple times by the researcher to extract common findings in order to develop potential themes. Developed themes for this paper are elaborated in section four in a detailed manner.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was performed via electronic search engines; Google Scholar and SAGE Journals. By using the mentioned key terms, relevant secondary data was collected. Secondary data collected by the researcher was mainly in the form of research articles addressing the holistic community development concepts while evaluating the secular and religious

perspectives for development of such community. Data collection was followed by the stage of data analysis. Author applied thematic analysis to qualitatively analyze the collected findings in the secondary data. Thematic analysis is widely applied approach in qualitative researches as it offers the opportunity to interpret the findings while integrating author's own opinions. This interpretive analytical strategy enhances the reliability of findings by increasing the likelihood of arguments and critiques by the author.

Limitations

Despite the range of arguments presented, critiqued and analyzed in this paper, it holds certain limitations. Major limitation was due to inaccessibility to advanced databases and some relevant data was missed due to inaccessibility to some useful articles that were costly. Moreover, due to time constraints, researcher was unable to access wider literature and used only one database to access relevant secondary data. Finally, only five themes were developed addressing based on potential findings of the research paper which could have been expanded further.

IV. THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of collected secondary data resulted in formation of five themes which are discussed below.

Secularism and Holistic Community Development

According to the holistic approach, there is a distinction between secular and religious perspectives. The approach is linked with various aspects of development; it delves into social, economic, and political factors. It is the perspective of the Pentecostal worldview that the physical, psychological, and spiritual domains cannot be set apart from an individual and his life, not either from the context of development. Pentecostalism is the approach to Christianity that believes in the concept of Baptism (Sampath 2015). The people consider Pentecostalism as the holistic concept; they believe in the realm of God; there would be no problems among the people, there would be no tension between the relationship of the God and his believer. Christians believe that when they accomplish God's direction, they can be called the human being and can be called the true followers in the eyes of God. It is not enough to develop economically and socially, but it is essential to develop the human being spiritually as well. What are the major distinctions between the religious, especially Christian, and the Pentecostal approach of development? Christianity provides the way of life to human beings (MacPhail 2013).

With respect to the grace of God, it is God's obligation to maintain solidarity and equality among all human beings. The capability approach emphasizes the idea of development that the individual is free to live and act according to his/her values and beliefs. The development perspective understood more easily under the religious domain. Apart from accomplishing the material needs, at the individual level, it is essential for an individual to maintain the relationship with God (Stearns 2014). It is the fundamental need of an individual to maintain a relationship with God. According to the religious perspective, it views development on the societal level as well. From this perspective, it is mandatory for human beings to maintain equality among each other and maintain just relations with each other. It is the direction from God that human beings have to respect each different value and maintain solidarity with each other.

Evangelism and Holistic Community Development

Every Church preached his followers that follow the principle of life in accordance with the preaches of Jesus Christ, who demonstrate his holistic vision in Luke "The Lord has chosen me to announce the good news to the poor. He has sent me in this world to convey the message to the people (Kapur 2015). He has sent me in this world to save the people from being oppressed and promote social justice in the world". Jesus was sent into the world to proclaim the good news and to free the individuals from any physical, sociopolitical and social bondage. Jesus was sent by God to save the world from the bad (John: 316), to proclaim the people to do good things according to the Will of God (John 4:34), to heal the people and announce them the good news (Matthew 9:35-38). Jesus was sent by the God (John 15:26), and Jesus returned to the God after the resurrection and the Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his believers; through which Jesus disciplines are transferred into the world (John 20:21-22, Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:47). Hence, it is clearly visible that in His ministry Jesus went into the world for teaching and preaching (Matthew 4:23, 9:35). Every Church has followed this ministry to do the things accordingly with the same discipline implemented by God. The holistic mission can be demonstrated as; it includes a real partnership of people on the earth to bring religious transformation in the lives of the people. There are three theological themes that affiliate between evangelism and Christian community development.

The first doctrine is Trinity. According to this doctrine, this applied a philosophy that; the community of mutual relationship is at the heart of God. The second doctrine is eschatology. Both evangelism and the Christian community have transformed the life of the people. A view of the realm of God enables the spreading of the Christian gospel is concerned with the current reality. This approach of eschatology view that Jesus, life, death, the resurrection has deep roots, where the people can easily shelter in. This eschatology has provided with the theory of world creation and the connection that human beings have with the God kingdom. Thirdly it is important to appreciate the Holy Spirit work. It is important for the people to the belief that the Holy Spirit has sent by God, and they are working in the world.

Religious Foundation and Holistic Community Development

In a community, churches and other organization plays an important role in the development. Due to the poor coordination and little capacity, the efforts to make develop effective community face hindrances. To lead the different communities, the role of churches and the other religious organization has gained vitality in the last decade and, most importantly, in the last few years. In the cohesion of the communities, churches also play an important role because we are living in a society where people belong to different cultures, sects, and the most important religion (Myers 2011). It is the firm belief of the Christians that churches are established in the world for promoting integrity and good in the world. Christians believe that the Church helps those people who are facing trouble and difficulties in life. It is the belief of the Christians that the Church can be a good sign for stablishing good in the society and can be the source of the attraction for the people; who are non-religious. Sometimes the Church works with other communities and the group to promote peace and harmony in the community; in different areas, they work in (Green & Haines 2015).

It is important to grant religious freedom to the community and the people, to express the thoughts about the religion and within the prescribed limits; follow the religious convictions. Outsiders or the dominant people cannot impose the religious duties on the followers. Over the centuries, the Christians communities aimed at contributing this concept in society (Skrable 2016). Practically, Christians have made efforts to restore good relations between the individual religious freedom and the religious uniformity for the common good. Christians believed that they are new to the community due to the gift of the spirit. Jesus believed in the idea of persuasion rather threat the people; it is against the preaching of the individual. It is important to prevent the civil orders and to assure that the Church can preach its message to the followers and the individuals, and individuals can come freely to follow the faith of the Christians. There are no restrictions for the followers; everyone and every individual can follow their faith and practices easily (McMillin 2018).

The Foundational Concepts about Holistic Community Development based on “The Great Narrative of Scriptures”

For proper integration of various constituents of holistic community in Developing Our World organization, the evangelical mission can be approached. These three approaches are based on the Biblical verses and “The Great Narrative of Scriptures”. The first approach in the evangelical mission takes the purpose of God as the starting point, which addresses embracing whole of the creation. Salvation under this approach cannot be viewed as a distinct process rather it assembles with creation as the Biblical message of salvation points towards "new heavens and new earth", pointing towards a holistic community (Skrable 2016). The purpose of salvation as addressed by Bible is not merely based on the endless lives of individuals in heaven rather it directs towards the transformation of the creation of totality. Turning of a person or community or group towards Christ is the eruption of new creation in this world and promotes its anticipation of the end of the time. The second approach assumes that just like the human being, the holistic community under evangelical mission is the unity of soul, body and spirit ad these three aspects are inseparable. Modern science and secularists support this view in this era which has also been mentioned in both the Old and the New Testament.

“Suppose your brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead”

(James 2:15-17).

Third foundational concept assumes that the sustainability of holistic community is based on integration of various evangelical elements. These include believing the "Christ Event", and the various incidences and aspects related to it such as Christ's life, his ministry, perspectives, and mission for his followers. Holistic community approached for development must incorporate the purpose of Christ's life and his salvation for the followers i.e., "the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

Value of Applying the Concept in the Mission Field Today

The central and integral part of Christian missionary work resides a motivational and powerful conviction that the human body and the community formed by them are a combination of soul, body, and spirit. The missionary organization 'Developing Our World' is based on similar to approached by organizations employing a holistic missionary approach. Community wellbeing requires more than the word of God, and in a holistic community developed under the missionary statements of Christianity is able to experience "life in all its fullness" (John 10:10, Matthew 4:4) through faith in Jesus. Organizations developed with Christian missionary statements work according to a holistic approach to serve God's creation. This requires balance between the social and evangelistic aspects of the work that can be pertained under practical versus theology work (Sider 1999). Evangelical missionary also claims that that separation of Christianity reaching practices can not be entailed from the local struggles for justice, since preaching in any religion is recognized contextual. Thus, the development of a holistic community must approach the evangelical missionary statement, prioritizing the preaching of gospel in addition to development of holistic societies.

V. CONCLUSION

The paper used a holistic approach and evangelical perspectives in addressing the development of a holistic community. The thematic analysis of collected secondary data resulted in formation of five potential themes; secularism and holistic community development; evangelism and holistic community development; religious foundation and holistic community development; the foundational concepts about holistic community development based on "the great narrative of scriptures"; and value of applying the concept in the mission field today. Discussion and analysis of these themes under the evangelical missionary statement of the proposed organization, Developing Our World, assume that approaching the holistic view of Christianity can address the development of holistic community. With the advancements in the scientific community, the everlasting ongoing debates between the religious and secular communities are also intensifying, complicating the essence of development of a holistic community that nurtures humanly needs and demands. The moral dimensions of human society are inevitable. The assumptions held about right and wrong are aspired by the nature of commerce, law, education, and relationships. The influencers of social values in secular and religious communities are similar – including sources like literature, history, philosophy, and science, however, even in social context, religious and moral traditions play a key role. In doing so, both secular and religious people benefit from each other and their achievements. However, for the development of a justly holistic community, the intersection between secularism and religious affairs has not been defined appropriately and thus results in wide gap in literature. This review addresses on plane of diverse conceptual frameworks to be focused upon for development of holistic community where secular and religious norms are assembled and equally addressed.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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Biography:

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