

SECOND CARNEGIE INQUIRY INTO POVERTY
AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Informal helping networks in a
Kwa-Zulu rural area

by

Ruth Buthelezi

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I INTRODUCTION

"Informal" care includes those sources of care and assistance provided by kin, friends and neighbours; indigenous or natural helpers; and informal self-help or mutual aid activities found within networks or groups, usually on an unorganized or spontaneous basis. (Wolfenden Report, 1978). By a large formal and informal helping networks offer care separately and independently most of the time.

It is of importance to look at the notion 'helping' in informal networks. Personal participation is an extremely important ingredient here, and informal helping is not a one-way activity but a mutual flow, involving the receipt and giving of help. It is provided as part of a continuing set of mutual exchanges that constitute a common cultural understanding among members. In Zulu, most of the "wise old sayings" regulating rights and obligations in 'helping', reflect the reciprocity that underlies any 'dignified' helping partnership. The stigma attached to being helped as a 'poor' powerless person is minimized by the notions that although a helper receives no direct payment, he/she may be helped in the future directly or indirectly.

Furthermore, the 'help' in informal networks indicates that not just information or technical knowledge but "help is given". The helper is somehow able to listen to things, react to them, say things, prove things, demonstrate things and otherwise act in such a way that he does help - "enables" someone else" to do something. In the end the helper is not himself/herself going to do whatever it is that must be done on the local scene. He/she is going to help someone else do what has to be done. It is the other person helped who must gain something from the exchange, because it is he who has to live with the situation that called for the interaction in the first place.

Not discussed in the paper is the role of the family or kin

as a support system to its members. Instead different types of people who perform essential roles within mutual-aid networks, (outside the family, and friends) are looked at. The aim is to explore those alliances among rural people that can be built by change agents or aided to be strong enough to negotiate with the authorities and take action to tackle the wider community problems and needs of development in the community. Community workers are faced with helping communities to cope with fundamental problems of poverty, unemployment, lack of basic social services and facilities etc.

While on this point of professionals aiding community efforts let us look at the justification for professional intervention in self-help. Cox et.al. (1977-177) expresses the idea by stressing that although the very terms "aided" and "self-help" seem to be contradictory, they do go together. In his own words he asserts:

We have learned I think all of us, that there is no such thing as a truly self-made man. We all get assistance from others in the development of our own characters, our own business enterprises, and our own careers, our own professional skills. So do cooperatives, even the most prosperous middle class cooperatives.

Furthermore, it is important to note that since community development in KwaZulu hinges on self-help, community workers must know what it means for the residents in order to "meet them half-way".

Cox et al 1977 further argues that:

"Today, it is even more true that most cooperatives among the poor will have to be aided self-help cooperatives. The trick is to

get aid at all, to get it at the right time and to get enough to get the business going. At the same time, the help must not be too much. It must not be enough to kill the cooperator's own sense of self-achievement".

Therefore every community worker/change agent must look very carefully at the total context in which he/she is to work. The approach adopted will be influenced by the setting. An approach for instance which is appropriate in an all white, long established, predominantly middle class locality or in a transient slum or township is not likely to be the right one for a rural tribal community - cultural factors and questions of class, land tenure, homogeneity - and in this paper, informal helping and coping strategies of the rural poor are clearly important.

A worker cannot learn everything about the context immediately. Part of his/her skill will be in determining what he/she needs to know first in order to be able to do the job. The aim of the paper is to introduce the reader to different categories of information on self help groups as informal helping networks identified in a specific rural, tribal locality.

II METHOD OF STUDY AND PRESENTATION

The data was collected in a survey from July 1981 to July 1983, and at six monthly intervals the inventory on the self-help groups was reviewed. The location is the KwaDlangezwa rural and tribal community, fifteen kilometres from Empangeni and a mere two kilometres from the University of Zululand.

"The 'worksheet' for analyzing pertinent community organizations" devised by Murphy in Cox et al (1977:41) was useful in collecting the initial information on the groups. This tool represented a practical research tool that evolved easily through practical application better than

a theoretically based tool would have done. It offered a comprehensive case study checklist usable for the simplest community organizations.

The inventory of groups were identified in the community in the period extending from July 1981 to July 1983 - and at a six monthly a review to find out which groups were still 'alive' and which defunct was carried out. Out of a total of 42 groups, 50 percent had members who had not met for 3 years. Some key characteristics of the groups will be discussed and a detailed evaluative analysis given. The argument for this method is most aptly put by Mouzelis (1967_ 68-70).

"By strategically choosing a few cases (say two to five), it is possible to combine intensity of study with comparative variations of significant variables ... By the 'intensive comparative' approach of a few similar cases, generalisations can be built up, valid in well circumscribed and narrow organizational contexts."

Further data was obtained through non-participant observation and participant observation of the various group meetings and activities; and through structured, formal and unstructured informal interviews with a representative sample of 'key informants' i.e. those people knowledgeable about the community. The study was done with the assistance of a young local community worker who, despite her higher education, age and sex, had the charm and the credibility to be accepted as part of the community. A 'practical' research tool was devised, based on what was happening in the community's own organizations, rather than based on theoretical formulations, As much use of case illustrations is made to project as much of the original meaning in the descriptions as possible.

The presentation starts off by briefly by

(a) outlining the 'context' of the social supports studied.

The 'context' includes some data on the area and some prominent large-scale pressures that cause the burdens for which individuals need support, and the differential resources upon which they can draw.

- (b) Some key characteristics of the 'alliances' or groups are identified and a classification devised. The aspects that receive detailed discussion include the formation of the 'alliances' or groups - where the initiative came from; the recruiting of members; the activities and the main activists.
- (c) The strengths and limitations of the informal support system are highlighted in the discussion.

Implications for organizing and programme planning by professionals are suggested.

III THE 'CONTEXT'

The area under study its characteristics from the 'context' within which the types of helping networks exist. Since "networks consist of people and relationships" (Collins and Pancoast, 1976: 18) an overview of the local Community and the large-scale pressures that cause the burdens for which individuals need help and some resources will be highlighted to help us see the available helping networks in their proper perspectives. The demographic characteristics of the community is not included here as such because of limited space.

The Mkhwanazi rural authority or area is considered as the 'community', which is the unit of research. It was selected as a rural area typical of the majority of rural areas of KwaZulu - which are areas undergoing rapid social change and are situated geographically on the periphery of small towns and townships - i.e. not too remote from modern urban influences, but still outside those. Although there is

great variance among the rural communities of KwaZulu manifested in the people's lifestyles, preferred customs, population density, geographic location and topography changes in response to population mobility technology and other factors.

There are similarities in the political social and other institutions regulating their lives: the tribal councils and regional authorities and other social community networks.

The community also shares with other rural KwaZulu areas the unique difference to urban areas in the social welfare service delivery systems (this includes welfare, health, education etc). The rural area has an informal network of persons helping each other and resources not commonly viewed as part of the conventional welfare system.

It has more limited experience with professional persons and their roles.

In a survey done in 1981 for a community group working to establish the number of disabled people and to start a sheltered employment workshop in the locality, out of a hundred adults interviews, 72 were women, who were responsible for someone sick, disabled or frail or who would be unable to live safely or comfortably without help - more were responsible for non-disabled children under the age of 16. Some carers were themselves in poor health, in some cases it was impossible to say who was caring for whom and caring imposed extra health hazards and additional costs.

Twenty one men were also carers, all but one of the male carers were in work. Most of the intensive all day caring was being done by women and retired aged men. The able bodied men were either at work or at the labour bureau seeking work. It was almost exclusively the fact that in the age group of people most likely to be in paid work, only women had forgone such employment to care for relatives. Most of the female carers in work had quasi-domestic jobs as school cleaners, home helps etc. and

had to be called at any time to do the work. If this finding is typical then it has enormous significance for studies on the family and our view of the restrictions on women's working lives. But for the time being care in the rural community can be regarded as usually by one person, unaided and unacknowledged.

Other rural communities in KwaZulu does not have the basic public services and amenities of the township or the towns or larger cities. There are no paved roads; no central sewage system; no tap water; no railway service or air service within it; they are limited for bus and taxi service; no large manufacturing and office structures or community centres or halls and library resources and so on.

Despite the presence of the University in the area for more than 21 years, the area is still sharing the majority of features with all other rural areas of KwaZulu. The tribesman refers to University staff children in their local schools as "children from the inside" izingane zanga phakathi in other words the 'outsiders'. This brings us to one shared characteristic that this community has with others, namely a tendency towards greater conformity to conventional norms, virtues and prejudices especially to outsiders i.e. those who are not part of any local hierarchical power system in which the residents are located. They will feel bitter that when things get rough, the 'outsider' can always get out. The resident may think:

How can you possibly know my problems and what to do about them unless you've lived with us as long as most of us?

- (a) A BROAD LOOK AT WHAT OCCUPIES THE RURAL RESIDENTS IN A TYPICAL DAY OR WEEK

The Mkhwanazi Tribal area, typical of other KwaZulu rural settlements in the 'outer periphery' is characterized by its

dependent relationship on the inner periphery and core (Buthelezi Commission Report, Vol. I, 1982: 176). The Empangeni-Felixton complex represents the urbanizing element which is touching the rural community where semi-subsistence agriculture is the main source of living, and the wage earning in jobs outside the tribe.

Everyday of the week as early as 04h00 one can see men and women in buses, lorries (trucks or pick-up vans) and bicycles, in their work clothes, getting to work, be it at Richards Bay, Empangeni town or Esikhawini Township or the University Campus - where they work as labourers, cleaners, builders, drivers, farm labourers in sugar cane fields etc.

Women are seen also in the busy roads, at bus stops, at gates of schools or on building contractor sites, trading from Monday to Monday. They deal in small fresh produce, cooked food, and fruit, and crafts, sometimes alcoholic drinks. They sometimes carry small children on their backs. They are at those 'roadside or gate markets' and stalls every day of the week whatever the weather. Young children of school-going age or teenage girls are normally at school, but some herd cattle, and of course, some are at home doing home chores, fulfilling the housewife role, where parents are away all day and there are small children left behind. These chores are: fetching firewood some 5 to 8 km away from their homes and carrying as much as possible on one's head; fetching water from the streams and carrying the tins on the head; it means doing laundry by hand at the river and hanging the clothes in the sun to dry; doing the ironing by hand, fixing a coal iron; scrubbing the house or tending the vegetable/mealie plots around the home; cooking large quantities for large families in an open fire in a small kitchen and so on. The home chores take up the entire day - which day is short because of poor lighting. Lighting up candle per room makes the home more conducive to sleeping as early as possible, thus shortening the average length of hours once can

spent outside the house.

The day for leisure time for most of the village people is Sunday. Some villagers would be doing the chores on Sundays, or they would visit relatives and friends, or go to soccer fields; or attend an odd meeting of the school or the Inkatha Social Cultural Movement (linked with Gatsha Buthelezi, the KwaZulu Prime Minister;) or go to the Tribal Chief's Kraal to report problems or to seek help; or stay at home and rest, and before sunset prepare for early-morning rising to go to work or to school.

The people in this community like other similar communities, do lead very 'full' lives. They are busy surviving in a relatively impoverished environment. But their efforts have not made it possible for their community to develop and to negotiate for proper services such as roads and adequate transport, adequate telecommunications, proper housing and water resources - nor have their efforts sustained them as full participants in the country's main stream economy. The latter seems to continually elude them. In times of scarce resources the informal business of a community is therefore a matter of concern for social development and one cannot say the community must be left on its own devices.

IV TYPES OF SELF-HELP GROUPS AS INFORMAL HELPING NETWORKS IN THE KWA-ZULU COMMUNITY

Any effort to deal with the genesis of self-help, must address the issue of typologies. How shall we classify these in a rural area?

Because of some of the problems of definition and classification, sociologists and anthropologists have attempted to distinguish among various kinds of social aggregates, some to be considered groups and others to be

identified by other terms - audiences, publics and the like. None of these could fit the informal helping network in the area - at least without modification.

The classification that follows seems to suit the type of self-help groups identified in the locality under study:

Category 1

Interactive Quasi-Groups and Action Sets

These are entities without a 'recognizable structure', but members have certain interests or modes of behaviours in common which lie beneath what could also be seen as a 'potential group'.

The quasi-groups differ fundamentally from the 'group' and 'association'. Firstly, they are ego-centred, in the sense of depending for their very existence on a specific person as a central organizing focus. The actions of any member are relevant only in so far as they are interactions between him and ego or ego's intermediary.

The membership criteria do not include interaction with other quasi-group members in general and the set does not form a group nor is ego its leader. But it is at that moment a bounded entity. It exists through a series of contexts of activity without any formal basis for membership. Examples of these "ad hoc action sets" include the following:

(a) Neighbourhood clusters

This is the smallest of the "aggregations"-above the level of the family (extended family unit). There are no hard and fast rules as to who should be included in this category of "neighbours" (OMAKHELWANE). Yet there is seldom any doubt in specific instances. If one asks a man who his

neighbours are, he will give a precise list - spatial relationships of homesteads play a large role in determining neighbourly duties - and "Good Neighbourliness".

Neighbours 'should help look after one another's property: be it to raise alarm when one sees cattle in another's crops; or when a fire breaks out; or when invited to the tribal chief's or to work parties or teams "ILIMA" and so on'. Neighbours should always be included among those invited to drink beer brewed for free distribution on ritual or festive occasions.

In addition to these specific duties, there is also the more diffuse obligation to behave in a "good neighbourly" way in general. This implies refraining not only from witchcraft but also involves striving to ease any tension which might arise, to remove any risk of witchcraft. One should never be one's neighbour's enemy, but one is not bound to make him one's closest friend.

Neighbours help one another in times of need - when a death or a birth or illness occurs, or when a minor problem occurs e.g. when one is short of salt or mealie meal one can make a "loan" from one's neighbour. This is based on mutual responsibility and social exchange - "You ask not for an outright gift but something you will return". Help is therefore a mutual exchange as all Zulu proverbial expressions relating to help will suggest.

It will seem that neighbours' clusters as units of local community organization may have limited importance but as a mechanism of mutual aid, they are very important.

(b) The Ad Hoc Information/Support Sets

This refers to the activities of unstructured quasi-groups in response to the need for information or support. It is activated structurally, usually in a specific context, and dissolves as soon as its function has been served. These provide emotional and social support, as well as provide

detailed information and specific guidance in increasing the members' understanding of the issues of concern. It includes suggestions for practical ways of dealing with the expectable day to day and long term problems.

Even with health problems people help one another.

A vignette helps to give this illustration its lifelike character. An informant will typically tell: Recently I was admitted for four days for medical treatment in the local hospital. As we lay in the ward, in between nurse and doctors' rounds, a lot of communication went on between us patients. Those that had been in before or, for a few days, offered all the explanations, information and advice to the others, which the nurses and doctors were not sharing with us e.g.

I had deep fears about the impending treatment, the possible ill-effects of the operation. Some women would express concern about their family or boyfriend left at home - all kinds of concerns were shared. If you had met on admission and were in the same ward you visited each other and invariably formed a cluster - with the neighbouring patients. Help for those who could not move more freely, but who could communicate was easily forthcoming, e.g. food brought in by relatives was shared etc.

No nurse or doctor was asked to explain or allay fears. The peer group did it, by telling of personal experiences. The faith healers and traditional healers were discussed and recommended for 'real' after hospital care treatment.

When some patients had church members or relatives who came to conduct a prayer meeting on Sunday visiting hours, members shared the "spiritual uplifting". These support sets were, like neighbour clusters, mutually helping but did not have to end in close continuing friendships. Addresses were not even shared when one was being discharged."

(c) The "Experts"

Lay mutual aid is sometimes available from "experts" who could be professionals or individuals or business people in other areas of practice. Often, for example the shop-owner of a small general dealer store will suggest approaches to hygiene, nutrition and self-care to his or her regular customers.

Category 2Self-Help Groups

Another group with key individuals who were representatives of self-help groups was neither ad hoc nor completely formal - the type of group similar to one which Brager and Sphecht (1973) refer to as the "organization development group". The various social/cultural-political groups organized by the INKATHA YENKULULEKO YESIZWE - THE NATIONAL CULTURAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT (known as INKATHA), namely the Women's and Youth Brigades are examples.

These groups have the following characteristics:

- i) They function to introduce people to others who share their personal, professional, political or philosophical interests;
- ii) they incorporated a wide range of circulation-enabling and horizon-expanding functions;
- iii) they have an uncharacteristically loose structure; membership is fluid, and the attachment of participants to the group is often peripheral. Commitments, although they may be vigorous, are not likely to be enduring. Activities are mass based e.g. rallies, exhibitions, etc. and have the potential for providing excitement stimulation and the image of massive public support.

Their problem focus can be specific, clearly defined and time limited. Their activities generated excitement and tended to be expressive and informal. Their structure permitted the

conduct of business even though members may come and go. This was particularly apt for person who, like the poor, have limited time and energy to expend in organizational effort. Nor did the members (or at any rate all except a small executive group) need to concern themselves unduly with organizational "housekeeping". The accoutrements of formal organization (by-laws, elections, procedures) which can become, for inexperienced participants, ends in themselves, did not concern the membership except when serious clashes arose and a constitution was seen as of use.

Examples of these groups were the eight per cent of the women's club/homemakers' club' kind of self-help groups, organized independently of the church. These were organized for sewing and cooking lessons, gardening; and would organize annual festivities in the community. They had strong links with one or two influential tribal councillors. Since the advent of the Inkatha Cultural Movement, the members tended more to coalesce with the Youth and Women's Brigade Sections of the Movement. One found that the leadership (membership of this type of group) also belong to the organization.

Category 3

Aided Self-Help groups

Aided self-help groups refer to groups which, although they are self-regulating on a day to day basis, have links with 'outside' formal agencies and professionals. These may be organized around some agency's development project. The project may mean an activity which is limited to a single specific need or concern and the investment of resource limited e.g. sugar cane planting project, etc. The 'aided self-help' groups may be part of a programme, i.e. a profession or agency may activate the development of a variety of activities in a co-operative and planned way, covering several areas of need of concern. The aided self-help programmes are the goal of most community development efforts.

Two percent of the groups referred to as the aided self-help groups were business farmers' co-operatives and sugar cane farmers' association. These were initially sponsored by the Department of Agriculture and the Sugar Mill Corporation to regulate the sugar cane processing for local Black sugar cane farmers. The local magistrate, the chief-in-council and the agricultural department's extension officers have a keen interest (although no financial and administrative responsibility) in these as part of the rural development programmes. They are to offer professional and technical assistance when invited to.

Twelve percent of the groups were involved in the small plot/garden farming. They had been allocated small plots by the chief through the Department of Agriculture and Forestry KwaZulu in specified areas.

A few general characteristics of the groups and how they function are selected for detailed discussion. It is hoped that these may give insight on how a strategy for working with informal sources of help can be formulated by professionals. When clear about the role of informal support systems in a community, we can begin to move toward developing mutually beneficial relationships with informal helpers.

IV THE ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE GROUPS: GENERAL FEATURES

1. Formation of the Groups

First, a statement of the obvious: people give time and energy to community groups for a variety of private and public reasons. (Henderson and Thomas, 1980: 167). The self-help groups are run by the people who benefit from them and thus the self-interest and the personal needs of individuals in the groups are significant motivations for joining the groups. Weismann (1970: 22) argues that one

major reason participants may have for joining an organization is to lower their costs in order to achieve a goal. Most members of groups reported that they came together to share with one another through learning new ways of doing things; and through working out together how to do things they could do more effectively as a group. These groups were mostly women's groups that organized sewing lessons, baking and gardening. They also seemed to need social interaction with other women - to be able to get a legitimate reason to go out of the house. These women were unemployed; were often mothers; and did have some time to spare; and had a desperate need for money of their own.

All groups were formed by members of the same sex or those living in close geographic proximity. They had experienced similar problems, similar environmental deprivations and poverty and celebrated together as neighbours or tribesmen in the same territorial neighbourhood. When giving their reasons for banding together, the following were cited:

(a) Common concern in meeting a 'felt' social and personal need to improve and to cope with changes in housekeeping and nutrition standards and needs of family members;

(b) a wish to cope with life-threatening or anxiety provoking problems e.g. death, illness (c) to develop co-operative income generating and/or agricultural enterprises; (d) to stimulate in members a sense of community care and responsibility for the ill, the disabled, and the young;

(e) to unite community members in groups for service, social interaction, recreation, and develop members in spiritual, cultural, social, and economic aspects of living. The groups, when telling of how they were formed, made no reference to their constitutions or to a public meeting - the inaugural general meeting expected of conventional welfare organizations. The groups did have constitutions - constitutions drawn for them by an 'outside' body which drew constitutions for other similar bodies, e.g. women's (agricultural) communal gardens have

one; the water committee have a sample from the agricultural extension offices, etc. Furthermore, when the groups try to open banking accounts, the banks require constitutions and office bearers. All of these 'outside' pressures have prematurely 'forced' the mutual aid groups to have these constitutions. The latter are of little practical everyday use to members.

In the main women wanted to know about income-generating activities, and in their non-formal learning approaches, helped one another to learn about these, and to organize themselves to learn. The women expressed that they had a need for money and for all members to provide for their families. Most members had started off with small-scale activities in their households, which would not generate income beyond just buying small household items, bread, a swater, or something.

Most knew one another well, had trust in one another's mutual concern and helpfulness - as they have been involved in ad hoc information and action sets or other helping networks. Such involvement with one another had generated knowledge and points toward the next step. It is a natural process - it is not contrived. People are working with what they have at hand, and it's not 'unrealistic' in terms of achieving their goals.

Most of the groups started with a primary care giving person, a dominant figure at the centre - who played the decisive role in bringing the members together. He or she can be regarded as the 'organizer', the convenor. This person carries the role not because a title or a position give him or her, his or her importance. Instead like the central family figure, has gained the trust and confidence of potential members because of what he/she has done or is believed to represent to members.

2. Membership

(a) Recruiting

Theoretically, membership in the informal mutual aid groups is open to all tribesmen. However, since few members of the community have been involved in a self-help group before - and most people are 'outside' of a network of caring relatives, friends or neighbours - membership is restricted and 'closed'. It is closed to 'outsiders' or newcomers, who are viewed with suspicion (and that includes professionals and bureaucrats). For example, most burial societies, 'stokvels' or credit unions had members of the same church, or neighbourhood isigodi; or kin or 'recognized' clansmen including some headmen or ministers of religion. The mutual aid groups' members were involved with one another over and above their other daily commitments, which can take a heavy toll of their domestic and social life. They thus favour participants in close geographic and social proximity with one another so they can meet one or more of its members daily and be drawn into informal discussions among themselves about the group and its activities. Actually members are recruited as members talk with neighbours, friends and relatives and a few selected others - who may or may not be the 'old comers' (izibonda/izifiki) - who are encouraged to join. All this consumes time and energy of people who often have other commitments to family, to support these families and to deal with a variety of other economic pressures.

The greatest fear expressed by local people, in getting too intimately involved with 'strangers' was that they did not trust them to have or to share the same understanding and opinion about local problems or issues.

All the groups were made up of members either of the same sex and marital status (the women's groups); or were members in the same church; (the burial societies made up of members of the same independent church of Zion, for example) and were from the same geographical locality - the poor

transportation and telecommunications problem demand that geographical proximity be a determinant of membership.

The members who stuck together usually shared similar ideological beliefs, e.g. as wives they needed to improve their homemaking skills as that is what their roles was expected to be.

Membership of mutual aid groups where money was exchanged or some other scarce resource, had limited membership not extending beyond 12 members. However, with the emergence of 'outside' financial sponsorship which demand a more extensive community wide membership, and to be able to qualify most mutual aid groups have attempted to 'open' membership. Groups have also had to expand to qualify for specialist consultations, e.g. women in gardening projects to qualify for communal plots and extension officers had to 'open' membership to the wider community.

At other times, people initially concerned with providing one service in a small project, would fan out into a major project with several facets. They learn so many things as necessary aspects of one particular project. On example comes to mind:

A "Homemaker's Club" started off with the aim of working for the removal of all conditions which are detrimental to the physical, mental spiritual and moral welfare of community members; to provide for and to visit the sick and engage in crafts and cookery and sewing demonstrations. However, as new members joined, and as the members in turn joined other groups, e.g. INKATHA Women's Brigade, the original form of the "Homemaker's Club" has changed. The club members are now involved in agricultural/garden projects; in organizing and raising funds for putting up special community events/festivities. For example, it has been involved in organizing a 'parents and youth day' and has been active in providing services on traditional chief's festivity days. Some of its members have organized themselves as

self-appointed action groups, taking action to apply for water facilities in their locality.

The same club has its dominant figure - who ran a small 'childminding' service, but has since expanded the service into a large pre-school day centre with sponsorship from local and international funding agencies.

The same group is 'church connected' since the dominant figure is a minister's wife, (of an ecumenical denomination). Thus, another aim that has won more members is that of "uniting members on grounds of fellowship, service and activities including opportunities for prayer and worship."

An illustration of the formation and organization of mutual aid groups and the resultant group goals and activities were analysed using Murphey's tool referred to in Cox et. al. 1977 will give the above discussion its life-like character.

A community/communal gardening a group is described. \

Example

"What we need," the women decided, "is a way to earn some money - money to buy things for our homes and our families, and to pay the children's school fees". The women had been challenged by hearing that women in other localities were doing it through co-operative gardening and then selling their produce. The answer, the women decided, was to start by approaching the tribal leadership for the plot for 'community gardens' as advised by the agricultural advisors. The latter also promised to give guidance to a 'group' rather than an 'individual'. They got the support of two tribal headmen to set up the gardens izivande. The women had a chairman, a dominant figure, and then elected a treasurer. They pooled their money, each of the 13 member group paid R2,00 to buy seeds and fertilizers.

The group managed to produce such good pumpkins in 1981 that when a celebrity visited the area from Ulundi he was given some. They told him of their difficulties with the marshy land and the lack of resources to remedy the situation around the Umlalazi rivier. He advised, according to the informant, that they collect money and approach 'outside' funding agencies to assist to construct furrows. The respondents reported that their gardens have only been able to produce something for home consumption and not for sale. The group still has trouble with getting regular technical guidance and thus the lack of progress.

Some members of the original group have dropped out and sought employment elsewhere or are buying vegetables and fruit from traders and selling at roadsides, bus stops and other places.

The chairman or dominant figure in informal groups deserves special attention in the analysis of how self-help groups in the rural traditional communities are organized. Pancoast and Collins advises, and this confirms the importance of this task: "By identifying a central figure, the social worker can come to understand a complex network of relationships through a single contact." (Pancoast and Collins 1976: 25)

First, it must be mentioned that most of the information on the central figure in the extended family applies to the way the central figure is basically perceived by group members and the way he/she perceives his/her role.

Alinsky, quoted by Henderson and Thomas (1980: 188) present an equally relevant explanation as to why the dominant figure is significant to identify: "You talk to people through their leaders, and if you do not know the leaders you are in the same position as a person trying to telephone another party without knowing the telephone number. Knowing the identity of these natural leaders, is knowing the telephone number of the people. Talking with these natural

leaders is talking with the people."

(b) The Sex Variable in the Groups Sampled

Sex

The distribution of males and females in key leadership positions, as dominant members in the groups, gives an interesting insight into male and female interests in the tribe. In the mutual aid groups like the burial clubs, socialization clubs, garden groups and other women's clubs, male leaders were about 10 percent. These were found in the leaders of independant church (Zionist) based burial clubs; or the odd youth and sports club within either the church or the Inkatha cultural movement.

Female leaders were represented in 90 percent of these groups. Actually no males were members in the female led groups.

In the aided self-help groups such as school committees; sugar cane growers association; agricultural co-operative and health and welfare organization(the latter two are defunct) more males were represented.

In the key position of chairman and secretary/treasurer 67 percent were male and 33 percent females. The increase in the female leadership is in the communal gardens and the school committees (two out of the 11 schools have female chairpersons). The males 'allowed' the females in the communal gardens's groups specializing in vegetables but the cash crop farming and the co-operative were their main interests. There was also a large percentage of males in school committees (office bearers) about 55 percent, compared to females. The development of schools in the tribe and other neighbouring tribal areas of Ongoye, has been considered a mark of a 'progressive tribe'.

Findings in regard to male and female involvement in support

groups indicate that women are more involved in networks of interpersonal and social relationships and communication, while male spheres of activity centre around their occupations. Furthermore the women's apparent disinterest or non-participation in tribal or extra-community politics emerges as a consequence of several barriers. Among others are the constraints of household and family responsibility and the strong sanctions against neglect of them. Hence, the activities of the women's group are designed by the participants not only to produce quick tangible results, but to centre around their roles as housewives or even breadwinners. The local community involvements are carefully monitored by women participants - they are less formal and the women leaders use indirect power with an emphasis on interpersonal power. Their involvements turn out to be less threatening on their traditional roles as mothers and wives.

3. The Source and exercise of Power of Authority and Influence in the Groups

None of the mutual aid groups had had a formally written constitution at its beginning. But they did have a 'chairman' usually in the person of the 'central figure' or 'founder'-the dominant figure and what they called unobhala an equivalent of chairman, and usikhwama, i.e. a secretary/treasurer. The latter is elected by the core group members for his/her known trustworthiness and reliability. However, in most cases he/she is 'very close' to and under the control of the dominant figure who is for all practical purposes the one trusted to have ideas and the ability to implement the ideas. The secretary/treasurer in case of a bank account, assists the chairman in signing cheques.

The power of the dominant figure comes from the fact that he/she is often the one with progressive ideas; can develop useful links for the group, raise funds and has more

knowledge of new developments in group organization community wide. Hence, it could be noticed that more than the rest of the membership, he/she had other group affiliations which eventually penetrated the original purposes and activities of the original group.

Dominant figures in the extended family as well as in self-help groups sometimes have more selfish motives than not, in their retaining their roles. Sometimes these 'selfish needs' do not necessarily negatively affect other members' satisfaction of needs, whereas in some it may lead to dissensus and disruption in the group especially when 'outsiders' come along.

Twelvetrees (1982:50) rightfully observes that;

The leaders of community groups are sometimes in the job for highly personal reasons, to compensate for unsatisfactory home or work life for example, although this does not necessarily affect the group. According to observation the lay indigenous women would compensate for unsatisfactory work life, while the educated middle class women seemed to compensate for unsatisfactory home lives.

Most dominant figures in informal helping networks had established themselves in their own families as influential and independent, without alienating their spouses. They were actually involved in very supportive roles to spouses - bringing cash or prestige to the spouse or his/her business be it the church or money making enterprise.

These 'natural' leaders were actively engaged in the helping network for many reasons - one of which was to keep their position of "dominant figure". The dominant figures - outside the group(s) - often perform a lot more acts of helping for individuals in the neighbourhood. These are the individuals who know where to go for help, know how to ask, and to negotiate on behalf of individuals in need. Their activities may include the following:

- a) A man may have a disabled child (deaf-mute) whose application to a school for the deaf has received no response for years. The dominant figure may drive to Nkandla Vuleka School for the Deaf and Dumb, to plead with the Principal.
- b) An old lady whose old age pension is not arriving, is accompanied to the Commissioner's via the chief or headman to request for poor rations, for the meantime.
- c) Any irregular behaviour by a civil servant(s) is reported directly to Ulundi - because the dominant figure is known and knows some key persons there.
- d) He or she has heard that some agency afford grants to a locality to provide drinking water (boreholes) or seeds and fertilisers and approaches them with the local headman, on behalf of his/her isigodi or even tribe.
- e) He or she knows who to ask for donation from his/her contacts with a variety of professional or agencies and thus applies for it, on behalf of his/her group. She/he knows who qualifies and thus influences his/her group to modify goals and activities in order to qualify.

He or she is better educated - may have a std 6 or 8 and is more articulate; has been around the area for years to qualify as isibonda if he or she was ever a newcomer. He or she has some connections with the church; or is related to the headman or is a friend to one; or has come out helpful on several occasions when the headman or some other influential community member needed help most (e.g. at weddings, funerals or festivities of any kind), or has housed a known and most needy tribesman or widow in his/her kraalhuts; or has entertained in his/her house as generously as possible the key leader(s) in the tribe and so on.

Dominant figures of natural self-help groups have a sense of fulfillment because they are needed by members of their mutual aid groups. Their lives revolve around their social

network. They are respected; few members of the group dare to be disrespectful to them.

V SOME MAJOR OBSERVATIONS MADE IN THE COURSE OF THE CONTACT WITH INFORMAL HELPING NETWORKS RE: LIMITATIONS THEREOF

Many rural poor did not receive any help when they were in trouble. Others made do with whatever their own resources or capacities allowed. Also informal spontaneous activities occur so often all around us that they usually pass without notice. It is only the "spectacular rescues" that were most likely to be noticed. In this respect, Gottlieb (1981: 264) observes: "Informal networks of support are a realm of care that is highly pluralistic and differentiated in the types of people involved, what they do, and why".

It needs to be noted that informal networks, because of their ad hoc nature had certain specific advantages for the beneficiaries: a) they could be quickly mobilized to respond to individual needs; b) there was no stigma attached to the help as helpee seemed to experience no value-conflicts or to have to surrender his/her independence to experts, and/or lose his/her privacy to the scrutiny of "strangers"; c) there were no long waiting lists or red tape or "odd" working hours etc. and d) the help was more personalized and warm. However, informal service networks had disadvantages - ones which the professionalized institutional services must have been developed to curb.

The number of obvious disadvantages to a community's total reliance on informal helping networks were: (a) many persons were not part of these helping networks, at one point or another of their lives, - be they family or caring relatives, friends, or neighbours. Less than 5 per cent of the population in the rural community were active members of self-help groups, for example.

(b) The informal services were based only on time-proven knowledge of the elderly or the dominant figures or the community influentials, and had been learned through personal life experience or had been passed on by earlier generations. This fact implied that new technical expertise and professional knowledge was not the basis for diagnosis and resolution of problems. Home remedies for abdominal pains and friendly advice and visits to an individual or small group of women may be helpful, but they are not sufficient when the pains are caused by an infectious disease (e.g. tuberculosis) and when marital problems are so complex such as to require professional help. In many cases, the person's needs drained the kinship or friendship systems. An extended family network might assure its members that they would not have to resort to begging, stealing, prostitution or other such means in order to "make it" - but it was not always successful. It sometimes was not equipped with the economic resources to assure members even a modicum of success in the dominant society e.g. to cope with the aged, the disabled, sick, etc.

Small mutual-aid groups, tended to become a substitute for needed services, a substitute that was inferior because the resources ordinarily provided were inadequate to the community-wide needs. Furthermore, the taxing tasks of service provision absorbed the energies of the community group that it was diverted from any further action in regard to influencing the larger institutional system. By their very nature, mutual aid groups focus on benefitting only its own members - the like-minded people who are more homogenous in class, culture and value system. This excluded innovative elements from 'outsiders' and tended to make intervention by change agents most difficult.

In many of the aided self-help groups negative and unanticipated consequences were reported in all instances where professionals and informal helpers had come together.

VI SOME LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned through the study will relate to two levels. One will be in relation to future directions in research on informal helping networks.

The second will relate to the implications of the observations in the exploratory study for the role of professionals in rural communities working with the poor.

A. Future directions of research in informal helping network among the poor

1. Research in this area will have to be attempted so it shall consist of comparative case studies of community development programmes in a small number of localities chosen to highlight features which contribute to the success or failure of such programmes.
2. No attempt be made to make the sample of the localities representatives of the country as a whole but the sample should consist of 1, 2 or 3 matched pairs of geographic localities, each pair being similar in several basic physical characteristics, but different in the extent to which the community development programmes appear to have effected changes in the directions intended. The variables of size resource endowments and distance from towns or main roads could be selected for matching.
3. A switch to a network analytic approach as suggested in Gottlieb (1981: 173-174) will be a useful one in the study of informal helping networks (as providers of social support). The approach is considered to have concepts and techniques which give it several comparative advantages over 'support system analysis' in the study of support or informal helping systems. The argument is presented convincingly as follows:

The network analytical approach treats help as a variable that "may" occur, and not as a given; it helps to analyze the circumstances under which a tie will or will not provide support/help: for example how the transmission of support is related to the characteristics of individuals, the ties that link them, and the networks that contain these ties. By looking at a broad range of ties, support is accurately treated as a contingency rather than a fixed relationship.

"We cannot freeze ties in an aspect as supportive or non-supportive, whatever slices we take of an individual's life". (Gottlieb: 1981: 180)

4. More attempts should be made to mobilize social support in informal helping networks on behalf of various people in need, and research studies on the programmes reported to consolidate knowledge and to propose future action research programmes for professionals in the field of community work.

B. Implications for the Professional role

There are a lot of practical programmes possible to design in order to foster mutually beneficial relationships between professionals and informal caregivers. Any such programmes are most likely to succeed if they adopt at least two elements: (a) a strong pro-informal community leaders and helpers ideology to instill a spirit of solidarity and self-confidence in them, and (b) a commitment to grassroots leadership as a means of strengthening and nourishing the dormant power of poor women. Therefore, there can be no blueprint programme planning suggested-requirements for staff, financing and programme should develop by adapting to the helping network's idiosyncratic styles. For example: (1) a programme to help rural women should begin with activities that produce quick, tangible results. It is best to

address their most immediate and concrete problems. Additional activities can then be sequenced, moving from basic economic needs to more complex social and political spheres. Only those issues most often discussed and most adequately analyzed by the women themselves should be addressed.

A program for women is more likely to succeed if it adopts at least two elements; referred to earlier i.e.:

- (a) a strong pro-women ideology to instill a spirit of solidarity and self-confidence, and
- (b) a commitment to grassroots leadership as a means of strengthening and nourishing the dormant power of women.

An organization wanting to reach and benefit large numbers of poor women need not have a lot of money, educated staff or technical expertise. The four factors that seem crucial are: (a) selection of one critical issue (credit facilities for projects), (b) organization of women around existing neighbourhood ties, and (c) decentralization of participatory management (d) There should be additional social services to provide women the necessary backup and support for their economic roles, such as day care centres, skills training forums and health and family planning.

Another aspect to be taken into account, is the utilization of indigenous workers. Indigenous workers are being experimented with in KwaZulu to provide health services. Where local resources are limited, either volunteers or paraprofessionals can supply additional service capacity. Currently volunteerism appears to be dependant upon the fact that the volunteer is in some way related to the person(s) in need. This is certainly a potent source of support, but inclusion of other groups can serve several purposes. The volunteer may gain information and understanding regarding the problems of the poor and organizing among the poor, as well as provide a specific

service.

Further, a great utilization and linkage of existing resources is an important element of the rural service delivery model. The initial impetus for meeting this objective is through a completed needs assessment by a "special project" person. Continued viability of a rural model would depend upon establishing a mechanism for maintaining and developing agency linkage not only at Head Office Departmental levels but also at local field office levels.

Many rural development agencies feel stymied in their efforts to upgrade services for the poor because of entrenched bureaucratic attitudes and policies, community disinterest and loss of morale by providers.

Most fundamental for the professions is not only to study and be clear about the role of informal support systems in community care, but for them to develop commitment to adopting flexible and new attitudes, roles and professional ideologies that express sensitivity and understanding of the norms of informal helping networks.

Because of the inherent ambiguities and tensions that arise and can erupt in questions of ideology and responsibility, professionals need to develop support networks amongst themselves to air frustrations provide consultations on problems, and help define strategies. More case studies of practice experience, must be written and shared - from which principles and new roles can be identifiable for others to learn from. Community workers must be accountable, and thus must order their 'practice wisdom' so as to eliminate the arbitrariness that can threaten deviation from the traditional direct, service roles.

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SALDRU
School of Economics
Robert Leslie Building
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch 7700