

A Psychological Approach to Rural Development

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Abstract

The concept of rural development is most often talked among the social scientists, policy makers, scientists and others. This paper brings forth the need for interventions from the field of psychology for providing a progressive outlook to the people as well as the system. It talks about the application of some of the psychological approaches discussed by Landini, Mendez and Hegedus for extension practices for sustainable development. These practices should also become a useful tool for supporting the livelihood struggles of the underprivileged section of the rural society. Thus, an attempt is made to highlight the need of psychology for rural development to raise awareness about its potentiality as well as applicability in dealing with the problems.

KEYWORDS: Rural Development, Psychological Approaches, Interventions, Extension Practices.

The term Rural Development reflects the nature of society that needs more concern for overall development. The rural atmosphere comprises of fresh air, water, natural surroundings, then also, why we talk for its development. Is development because we want to make that part of the society equitable or for the growth of the economy. To what extent we are able to achieve the target of this growth, who needs to be more focussed and what mechanisms need to be laid down for the development. Keeping these questions in thought what psychological interventions can be implemented for a sustainable rural development.

The concept of rural development is used confusedly with agricultural development. The agriculture development aims at increasing agricultural products such as crops, livestock, fish etc. On the other hand, rural development targets on people and institutions. Rural development includes agricultural development activities; however, it is one of the means of economic revitalization for active farmers and targeted rural villages. The notion of development arose in the mid-20th century linked closely to gross national product per capita (Alvavez, 2001; Landini 2007a). This conception carried two consequences. First, modernisation (the process of transition from traditional to modern societies underpinned by technical and institutional transformations) (Arce & Longe, 2000); Second, it legitimized developmental interventions in so called 'underdeveloped societies' (Arce, 1995 & Escobar, 2007). The modernization introduced new technologies and machinery to the farmers for better crop production as well as income generation. This helped in bringing rural extension, a practice that emerged as a national strategy in USA during the earlier 20th century was popularized in this context and later exported to most Latin American countries as the main means of

transferring knowledge and technology to farmers (Cimadevilla, 2004). This was carried by rural development agents known as rural extensionists (De Shutter, 1982; Leuwis, 2004).

But this notion of rural extensionists was criticised in the mid-1970s as being more top-down interventionists and more emphasis was placed on incorporating the social and cultural dimensions to it. (Landini, 2007). This paved the way for the most differentiated notions of 'development' and 'modernity' (Arce 1995; Escobar, 2007; Long, 2007). That led the scholars to reject the hierarchical, unidimensional and ideological structure of relationship established between rural extensionists and farmers (Freire, 1973; Leuwis & Aarts, 2011, Schaller, 2006).

The extension practice through different programmes and actions should aim to improve the quality of people's lives using evidence-based science (Atilas & Eubanks, 2014; Wang 2014). Extension practice is not about knowledge and technology but instead about generating changes at individual, group and community levels that improves people's lives and generate development. Having an understanding of social sciences to all extensionist practitioners, given that the purpose of extension programming is to modify human behaviour. (Beaulieu & Cordes, 2014). In this context the literature shows lack of contributions by the psychology world (Murtagh and Landini, 2011). But the literature also shares that recently in Latin America an interesting attempt at a debate on the contributions to extension practice is being highlighted. In researches conducted in these countries, argued that psychology could make real contributions to their practice, particularly in areas such as group management, cooperative behaviours, participatory processes, gender issues and others (Landini, 2015).

The next section of the paper will bring forth the interventions plan in psychology overcoming the prevalent problems in rural development. They can act as psychological processes. Mostly, psychology plays an important role in clinical practice within the context of mental health. It also encompasses multiple disciplines which addresses the subjects relevant to the practice of extension. Such disciplines include clinical, community, educational, environmental, organizational and social psychology.

The field of psychology involves both knowledge and capabilities that is useful for extension practice. It can be adapted to meet the needs of extension personnel to be relevant to their practice. Some of the aspects of extension having strong psychological components which can play a beneficial role in rural development are proposed by Landini, Mendez & Hegedus-

1. **Interpersonal Relationships and Cultural Competence:** Interpersonal trust and credibility are invaluable assets when working with people, communities and various partners within the field of extension (Landini, 2016). The US Cooperative Extension Workers have to build cultural competency (Bettancourt, Green, Carrillo & Ananeh-Firempong, 2003) so as to better serve the increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse US population. Thus, the social and community psychology can make important contributions related to the study and understanding of interpersonal attitudes, social interaction and interpersonal communication. (Franzoi, 2007)

2. **Group Processes and Cooperative Behaviours:** An important part of extension practice takes place in the context of group or collective settings (Sligo & Massey, 2007). This includes interinstitutional partnerships, extension councils and farmers training programmes. Cooperative success has been enormous and extends far beyond farming to all of rural community life. It works because it empowers members, represent equity. There is an effective power when farmers cooperate around their shared needs and common purposes. Cooperatives effectively harness group power for the good of each member without compromising individual freedoms. Cooperatives prove themselves the world over, performing even in the most chaotic circumstances.
3. **Learning Processes and Human Resource Development:** Extension practice is essentially a process of nonformal education (Torock, 2009). Depending on the context, education and learning in extension involve a wide array of strategies, from the transfer of knowledge to the development of life skills, and from experiential to virtual learning. The organizational psychology is significantly linked to on-the-job training, and community psychology to social learning, with both subdisciplines aimed at developing practical capacities for dealing with changing and complex environments (Guillen, 2009).
4. **Participation, Engagement and Ownership:** Development processes and extension programmes need the participation and engagement of all stakeholders to be sustainable (Prokopy et al., 2012). Without stakeholder participation and involvement, extension simply is not possible. Bennett (1975) recognized this importance and included participation as a key step in his renowned model of evaluation. Thus, it is fundamental that extension proposals respond to clients 'and communities' needs and that recipients participate throughout the process (Borden et al., 2014). Community psychology has a long-standing tradition in the study of people's participation, engagement, motivation and ownership (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010), which could be very useful for extension practice.
5. **Technology Adoption, Behavioural Change, and Innovation Processes:** Most of the contributions psychology has made to the field of extension have been in the realm of technology adoption (Straub, 2009). Along this line, psychology has much to contribute to the study and understanding of processes of behavioural change (Pratt & Bowman, 2008) in different areas, such as classical technology adoption and incorporation of proenvironmental practices (Holahan, 2011) and healthful habits. In addition, it can contribute to understanding and fostering of more complex processes, such as non-predefined technological or organizational innovations, through interaction, reflection on practice, and social learning (Leeuwis & Aarts, 2011).
6. **Evaluation and Accountability:** Accountability to clients regarding the use of public funds is an important concern within U.S. Cooperative Extension and elsewhere (Beaulieu & Cordes, 2014; Borden et.al., 2014; Christoplos, Sandison, & Chipeta, 2012). Scholars and practitioners in the United States have tended to focus on either subjective measure (e.g., satisfaction with the service) or hard data (e.g., technology adoption). In this context, psychology could help generate new indicators as well as provide new strategies for measuring non-traditional results and impacts, such as improvements in quality of life, self-esteem, and community trust and networks.

7. Reflection on Practice and Continuous Innovation: Reflection is a key component of both experiential learning (Torock, 2009) and innovation processes. Studies in organizational psychology and related scientific disciplines have shown how organizational learning and innovations occur and how they can be fostered (Fitzpatrick, 2006; Kim, MacDonald, & Anderson, 2013).

These psychological processes would definitely provide successful results if it gets the community participation to address the rural developmental issues. It should also help in establishing a system of connectedness among the rural underprivileged and the urban people. These approaches need to be dealt with an action-oriented perspectives emphasizing on human agencies and social interfaces of social actors with different backgrounds and worldviews.

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