



The Role of Community-Based Organizations in Promoting Inclusive Education Practices Outside the Formal School System

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the involvement of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in support of inclusion programs outside the traditional schooling context. In this paper, CBOs' approaches to redress educational imbalances and facilitate the education of the disenfranchised are showcased through successful case studies in various global contexts. The findings stress the role of CBOs as effective local performers in the identification of educational needs, the function of intermediary agents between the formal educational systems and the local communities and environment, and the development of inclusive learning processes. We discuss the use of non-formal education programs by CBOs as well as advocacy, social mobilization, and partnerships with schools and policymakers. The paper also describes the issues encountered by CBOs in supporting and promoting the principles of inclusive education, as well as potential measures for improvement. This paper also shows the importance of CBOs in attaining educational equity and inclusion since it also presents different models for demonstration. The insights, therefore, extend the definition of inclusive education beyond school-based provision and will provide information for policy, teachers, and other stakeholders who are interested in providing opportunities for learning to everyone.

Keywords: Community-Based Organizations, Inclusive Education, Non-Formal Education, Educational Equity, Marginalized Learners, Community Engagement, Educational Policy

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has now become one of the most important priorities for equal and quality education for every child with or without disabilities and from all backgrounds. The goal of this approach is to develop learning contexts that people with diverse characteristics can embrace and flourish in, thus allowing each learner to fully engage in the learning process (UNESCO, 2020). While the definition of inclusive education differs, it is important to note that it goes beyond integration, whereby children with disability are placed in a regular classroom. Rather, it entails pedagogy, changes in materials resources, curriculum, and organizational structures that respond to difficulties in learning and participation (Ainscow et al., 2019).

Despite the advances made toward the incorporation of the principles of inclusion in formal schooling systems, attention is gradually being paid to the fact that such practices need to go further than child and school environments. Learning happens in many settings and across the human lifespan; while the purpose of learning can be met through a variety of non-formal means, many people, especially those in the global south, have low levels of schooling. Hence, the application of inclusive education practices for learners who are marginalized in non-formal and community-based settings provides wider reach in trying to redress the injustice of society on access to education (Rogers, 2014).

To be precise, CBOs are valuable as they act as intermediaries between the current education systems and the communities who are, in most cases, left out. These ground-up structures are, therefore, better placed in terms of appreciating and addressing local education needs because they provide programs as well as support services to meet clients' complementary needs that are not necessarily offered by formal education. CBOs participate directly in many forms of educational activities, from preschool education to vocational training and literacy campaigns to pushing for educational rights and political changes (Edwards & Klees, 2015).

1.1. Aims and Research Objectives

This paper examines the pivotal role of community-based organizations in promoting inclusive education practices outside the formal school system. By analyzing diverse case studies and successful interventions, we aim to:

1. Identify effective strategies employed by CBOs to foster inclusive learning environments.
2. Explore the challenges faced by CBOs in implementing inclusive education practices and propose potential solutions.
3. Assess the impact of CBO initiatives on educational equity and access for marginalized learners.
4. Examine collaborative models between CBOs, formal education systems, and policymakers to enhance inclusive education efforts.

The paper starts with the theoretical background and the analysis of the literature on the subject of inclusive education and community approach. We then discuss our research method before the broader context of community-based organizations is described. The middle focuses on the measures taken by CBOs regarding the concern of IE through research and sound analysis of existent situations in different countries and regions. We

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describe the issues CBOs experience and review the approaches for measuring the impact of their programs. It also reviews different strategies and combinations of CBO to boost the organization and partnership efforts. Last is an analysis of the policy consideration, recommendations on CBOs with regard to the push towards inclusive education, and future advancements in this area. By completing this extensive literature review, we want to assist in expanding the field's knowledge of inclusive education beyond formal education and offer guidance to professionals, legislators, educators, and scholars who are seeking education for all.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Inclusion is a broad concept that is ever-changing as a result of the dynamic advancements realized over the past half a century. Fundamentally, it refers to a model of learning specially designed to cater to all students without prejudice to their disability with regard to physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other related aspects (UNESCO, 2020). Ainscow (2020) observes that inclusive education differs from integration, whereby learners with learning difficulties are placed in mainstream schools. It involves modifying educational provisions to effectively address learners' needs. This transformation entails changing the approaches to teaching strategies, curriculum, and school environment so that all children can engage fully in learning activities.

In ensuring the provision of quality education, non-formal education is significant; therefore, embracing education for all targets marginalized people who are not able to access formal systems of education. According to Rogers (2014), the use of non-formal education can be more beneficial to out-of-school youths, adults, and any other people who have little hitch to formally styled schooling. Such programs, therefore, include culture-sensitive content and teaching approaches; hence, they can be easily understood by students from different cultures (Hoppers, 2006).

Another characteristic feature of the given models of education is that they view context and community involvement as critical in education. These approaches focus on the learner's participation in learning, indigenous knowledge, and skills acquisition relevant to their needs (Bray & Kwo, 2014). Community-based interventions in education as intermediaries between the formal schooling systems and social contexts enhance increased development in childcare practices that help promote community relevance (Nishimura, 2017).

There are several theoretical frameworks on which the concepts of social inclusion and educational equity rest. Sen's (2009) capability approach can be used as a heuristic for discussing educational equity, as it is focused on the enhancement of freedom. Freire (1970) provides examples of how specific educational policies and practices might simultaneously expand and limit freedoms and minus. Freire (2018), in his critical pedagogy, emphasizes the possibility of bringing socio-cultural justice through education. Further, intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 2017), which examines how social categorizations intertwine to impact the education process and results, is helpful.

Despite the recent increase in research focusing on inclusive education as well as the role of community-based organizations, several research questions/areas are still underdeveloped. Interestingly, Edwards and Klees (2015) rightly opine that there seems to be no extensive research done on the effectiveness of the CBO interventions for enhancing educational achievements in exclusionist situations for the learner. Furthermore, there is inadequate literature on the possibility of replicating effectively functioning CBOs from various other perspectives (Unterhalter, 2019). More research is also required to understand the strategies for working to enhance the partnerships between CBOs and the formal education systems to enhance pro-inclusion practices.

2.1. The Landscape of Community-Based Organizations in Education

Community-based education organizations are a broad category of organizations that are involved in carrying out educative activities, and they include community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, Local Non-Governmental Organizations, and Cooperatives. Such organizations differ in size, staffing, and tasks but are united by the desire to meet local education demands (Edwards & Klees, 2018). Some CBOs focus on definite sectors like early childhood education, illiteracy control in adults, or vocational training sector, while other CBOs have a comprehensive strategy for the development of communities through education.

The concept of CBOs in education has been practiced for many years, although its origin may be traced back to community and social self-help movements. Bray and Kwo (2018) describe how CBOs in education have changed from simple learning groups in the community to more organized groups that support the deficiencies of formal educational systems. The engagement of CBOs has received more emphasis in the last decades, especially in the framework of Education for All and the Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO 2020).

CBOs involved in education projects are located in various settings, ranging from rural areas to urban poor areas. Although CBOs are most visible and active in developing nations where the state's capacity to provide education is weak, they are also influential in developed nations to redress educational injustice (Nishimura, 2017). CBOs not only target learners who are out of mainstream education but also society's excluded groups and distant geographical locations.

CBOs continue experiencing instability in funding their efforts to educate the people on issues affecting them. Some depend on public funding, donations, and government subsidies, which are common sources of income for many educational NGOs (Edwards & Klees, 2018). Some of the shortcomings that are associated with the dependence on external funding include inadequacies in program sustainability and lack of focus on the donor's

objectives. There is growing interest in the use of social enterprise and community-based microfinance to supplement the growth of the financial sustainability of CBO's school and education programs (Unterhalter, 2019).

Thus, the details of the interactions between CBOs and formal education systems depend greatly on the context. At times, CBOs are directly involved with the schools and the education departments to support the existing and formal education programs. In other cases, CBOs may be more autonomous, working to supplement a poor or inaccessible education service delivery modality (Rogers, 2021). Governments are growing awareness of the roles of CBOs in supporting education; hence, there are attempts to formalize these partnerships and mainstream the CBOs' strategies into national education frameworks. However, there are some issues like coordination, non-acknowledgment of non-formal education, and lack of appropriate relationships between CBOs and government within the autonomy and responsibility frameworks.

2.2. Strategies Employed by CBOs to Promote Inclusive Education

CBOs use a variety of approaches that involve the community and stakeholders in the support of needy children in schools outside the disability system. These strategies are most commonly used to respond to local problems and to mobilize local resources to establish meaningful and available educational activities for the target populations.

The CBOs often use non-formal education as one of the focal strategies in strengthening the policy of inclusion in education. These programs are noted for their structure, learner orientation, and open-door policies to society.

Literacy and numeracy are common in many CBOs because they represent basic skills that society ought to possess. Such programs tend to focus on the youths who are out of school and other adults who cannot make it to formal schools. For example, the campaign that was pioneered by different stakeholders, such as "Each One Teach One," has been successful in raising basic literacy levels in poor societies (Bhola, 2006). Generally, such programs are characterized by participative approaches to learning and context-specific information.

Since the acquisition of practical skills is equally vital in livelihood improvement, most of the CBOs have vocational and life skills training. Such initiatives typically encompass technical training, business management and entrepreneurial studies, financial management, and other interpersonal skills. Tripney et al. (2012) also pointed out that vocational training in low- and middle-income countries led by CBOs enhances the employment prospects of youths who are marginalized.

CBOs also use arts and cultural education as a way of passing on cultural diversity and cultural endowment. Such programs can also be very useful in reaching out to learners who have some form of disconnect with academic subjects. Ewing (2011) explains how education activities with references to arts by CBOs can be useful for cultural affirmation, communication, and cognitive growth of the excluded children.

CBOs may design programs for the targeted minority group for whom the principles of inclusion in education may be most threatened. Most CBOs are involved in the education of girls and women, considering barriers to education that are unique to the gender. Such programs can comprise girl's clubs, mentorship programs, and combating early marriage as well as gender-based violence. Sperling and Winthrop (2016) provide a detailed review proving that girls' education boosted by CBOs has a positive effect on education, health, and the community.

CBOs are also important for advocating for and implementing education for disabled learners in areas where the formal structures have no capacity or means to address the needs of disabled children. Such an act may entail community reintegration activities, learning support in school, and campaigns in support of disability. Singal (2019) acknowledges that CBO interventions are useful to increase the education of children with disabilities in developing nations.

Ethnic and linguistic minority learners are marginalized in mainstream education systems, and for this reason, many CBOs design special programs to cater to these learners. Such measures may comprise mother and teacher home languages, cultural maintenance activities, and transition programs from preschool to school. Benson (2018) also shows that the mother tongue education promoted by CBOs enhanced the learning achievements and cultural sustainability of the minority group.

Frequently, CBOs are using technology to enhance the inclusiveness and impact of their education interventions. Mobile learning applications, the use of radios in educating society, and the use of community technology centers are some of the strategies being used. The current COVID-19 pandemic has escalated such a situation, with many CBOs shifting to online support for learning (Sachs et al., 2019). However, there are still difficulties in providing equality in the distribution of technology and in producing locally relevant content.

Understanding the importance of families and communities in supporting inclusive education, most of the CBOs pursue parent and community involvement initiatives. Such measures may consist of training for parents and caregivers, center-based community learning, and school-based and community-based management committees. Epstein (2023) has it that such community involvement is beneficial in enhancing students' learning outcomes and school performance.

Advocacy and policy influence are other common activities of CBOs that bring about system changes in support of inclusive education. Such efforts may include advocacy for increased awareness, policy advocacy with government representatives, and planning forums for education sector stakeholders. Mundy and Murphy (2001)

conducted a study that provides data on the increased role of CBOs in influencing national policies and international development frameworks concerning inclusive education.

2.3. Challenges Faced by CBOs in Implementing Inclusive Education Practices

As much as CBOs are key stakeholders in creating awareness of inclusive education, they are faced with some challenges in the delivery and continuation of the intervention. Such complexities are vital to understanding to establish methods for the effectiveness of enhancing the coverage of inclusive education by CBOs.

As for the various difficulties of CBOs, it is possible to identify the problem of the lack of resources and the unpredictability of financing. The majority of CBOs are dependent on donors and normally operate on very thin budgets, given that funding in this area is short-term and highly competitive when it is available (Edwards & Klees, 2015). It may be a problem that creates enormous difficulties in the planning of the organization or institution's financial strategies and the sustainability of its initiatives. Sperling & Winthrop (2016) stated that it is always difficult to maintain the level of program quality and coverage when it comes to the flow of funds through CBOs.

The CBOs, especially the young or those started at the grassroots level, may not be aware of issues related to special needs or the use of improved techniques that are vital in realizing inclusive education. This limitation can determine the type and intensity of the educational treatments that are offered. Singal (2019) stated that most of the CBOs that assist learners with disabilities are aware of the fact that they lack adequate knowledge and skills in the promotion of inclusion for learners with disabilities.

However, on the basis of the fact that a lot of CBOs are still able to design and implement effective and quite special simple small-scale intercessions, their extension to the scale level, which presupposes an impact on greater populations, concerns considerable issues. The nature of challenges, like context specificity, resource demands, and adaptation, act as a challenge to scaling (Mundy & Murphy, 2001). The challenge is thus to maintain the quality of the program and the outcomes it is designed to deliver as it continues to spread to wider audiences.

CBOs function in societies where cultural and social practices eliminate the possibilities of inclusion for learners. The process of eliminating prejudice in relation to some categories of people, for example, girls or persons with disability, can be a very tough task. CBOs that work with linguistic minorities have to negotiate various socio-cultural issues to promote education.

However, there are some challenges that accompany the interactions of CBOs with the formal systems of education as well as their functioning in accordance with government policies. While such coordination is most important in working for sustainability and cross-program impacts, the position entails managing a plethora of bureaucracies and policies. In the social interactions between CBOs and the formal education systems, Rogers (2014) noted some challenges, which include authority and responsibility and accreditation of non-formal learning.

2.4. Impact Assessment and Evaluation of CBO Initiatives

Assessing the impact of CBO-led inclusive education initiatives is crucial for demonstrating effectiveness, improving programs, and securing continued support. However, measuring the multifaceted outcomes of inclusive education presents unique challenges.

Effective impact assessment requires a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators. Quantitative measures might include enrollment rates, retention rates, and academic achievement scores. Qualitative indicators often focus on aspects such as learner engagement, social inclusion, and community attitudes towards marginalized groups. Epstein (2023) emphasizes the importance of holistic assessment approaches that capture both tangible and intangible outcomes of inclusive education initiatives.

Measuring effectiveness and impact as well as the sustainability of a CBO in the long run is a very difficult task though very important. Others relate to the ability to monitor results in the long-term and the extent of the net impact that results in individual lives and public perceptions. Tripney et al. (2012) highlight more research based on the longitudinal designs are required in order to comprehend their effectiveness as well as factors influencing social inclusion.

Some of the difficulties inherent in the evaluation of impact relate to the type of education offered by CBOs, which is non-formal. These programs come with a lot of flexibility and context-sensitiveness, which makes it hard to apply standard assessments. However, assessment for and of diverse learning that goes beyond the conventional measurable achievements also creates new ways of evaluation (Rogers, 2014).

Current trends in monitoring and evaluation that is recommended for CBOs include the use of active participation in the evaluation process, the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative methods, and generation of baseline measurements that are relevant to the specific environmental circumstances. Mundy and Murphy (2001) more focus should be placed on the evaluation criteria within which learning and development should be possible so that the CBOs could improve on their practices.

2.5. Collaborative Models and Partnerships

CBOs' collaboration with conventional schools can play a very significant role in enhancing the quality of delivery of inclusive education for disabled learners. Such partnerships can be as follows: sharing furniture and learning resources, exchanging best practices, and even incorporating non-formal learning into the school setting. Some of

the best practices in school-CBO collaboration have pointed out the way through which educational accomplishment for minorities has improved.

There is a need to engage with government departments and policymakers for CBOs to be well-positioned to demand systems change as well as to guarantee the sustainability of the interventions. They can lead to the adoption of the CBO strategies in the policies regarding education in a given country and recognition of the models of learning in alternative education. However, the challenge that comes with managing this relationship is autonomy as it relates to the government, yet at the same time, it is important to align the goals of the universities with the government's objective.

CBOs' effectiveness may be boosted by the formation of networks/coalitions and by knowledge exchange. The consolidation of CBOs enables them to pool together resources, share comparative information, and speak in one voice in advocacy. The dynamics of the inter-CBO networks research have noted that they have been fruitful in managing the issues related to education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Such coalitions with CBOs, private businesses, and public organizations are likely to evolve new faces for education to learners with disabilities. These can assist in linking many resources and knowledge, as well as approaches for solving numerous educational problems. For instance, technology organizations that partner with CBOs have developed effective digital learning tools for vulnerable persons (Ewing, 2011).

Another factor that can be highlighted when explaining how the practice of CBO-led inclusive education programs can be implemented and further developed is international cooperation. This can be in the form of foreign cash, technology, or knowledge flow from one country to another or their affiliated institutions. However, as observed, it has been stated that it is crucial to see to it that the international support availed meets the demands of the respective countries. In this regard, Unterhalter (2019) has rightly said that dependence on external funding must be minimized while building local ownership and capacity in the context of international cooperation.

2.6. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The central role of community-based organizations (CBOs) in the advancement of inclusive education calls for attentiveness concerning policy considerations and recommendations for the improvement of the CBO's function and outcome.

National policies on education should propose that CBOs should be involved in supporting special education. Such integration may include the establishment of institutions in which CBOs can be involved in the planning and delivery of the education sector. According to Mundy and Murphy (2001), such inclusion results in comprehensive and relevant policies on education that enhance the learning of marginalized learners.

Due to the limited and often rigid funding arrangements that are usually provided to CBOs by international governments and donors, there is a need for the establishment of more sustainable and flexible funding models in relation to inclusive education. This could include, but not be limited to, multi-year funding, performance-based funding, and capacity development funding. According to Edwards and Klees (2018), sustainability supports the establishment of CBO programs and, therefore, calls for stable funding.

There is a need to enhance the funding for the CBO staff and volunteers for professional development for the enhancement of quality and practicable services in inclusive education. This can mean that training, mentorship, or knowledge sharing can be used as a tool in improving Organizational Development. Globally, Singal (2019) underlines the need for CBOs to develop specialized knowledge and skills in the fields of special needs education as well as inclusive teaching models.

There is a need to come up with policies that will help in the accreditation of non-formal education programs that are provided by CBOs. This recognition can help the learners to facilitate their transition between the non-formal and formal education system and also enhances the recognition of the CBOs. Thus, Rogers (2021) has stressed the importance of the development of more flexible accreditation models that accept various learning processes.

Such changes require more extensive policy improvements on the national level in order to foster and enhance the role of the education providers--both formal and non-formal ones. This could mean changing curriculum documents, methods of organizing assessments for students, and even the preparation of teachers to comprise components of inclusive education. Ainscow (2020) stresses the need for educational change at a macro level that targets existing obstacles to inclusion.

2.7. Future Directions and Emerging Trends

It is expected that the role of technology in increasing the coverage and effectiveness of inclusive education interventions led by CBOs will continue to rise. Such learning environments, mobile learning applications, and adaptive technologies open opportunities for the inclusion of the learners who were previously excluded and the individualization of learning. Sachs et al. (2019) described how CBOs are using technology to mitigate the challenges of geographical and resource limitations in the provision of inclusive education.

Global conditions that are emerging of late, like climate change and pandemic, are posing new demands for the implementation of inclusion. Thus, new challenges will arise before CBOs, which will require creating programs that help people become more resilient and provide conditions for flexible learning. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, has highlighted the importance of flexible and emergency provision of inclusive education interventions.

Thus, the development of new financing models is necessary for the long-term sustainability of CBO initiatives. New directions are social investment bonds, micro-finance with reference to communities, and the use of public, private, and philanthropic money. In this case, Unterhalter (2019) has described how these progressive sources of funds could be useful in funding inclusive education policies.

There is an appreciation of the fact that both CBOs and the formal education systems act in synergy and are likely to change their interactions in the future. This may lead to increased intersectionality of interventions that can be described more as a formal and non-formal education system. According to Bray and Kwo (2014), the future of CBOs and schools will be characterized by integrated learning systems that will benefit all learners.

CBOs are thus well suited to undertake a major responsibility in the two areas of lifelong learning and adult education, which are rapidly emerging as key pillars in the education development framework of the world. That is why they are flexible and community-oriented, which makes them the perfect providers of context and needs-based learning for adults. Rogers (2014) underlines the possibilities of CBOs in the formation of a lifelong learning framework in which people foster their skills and character over the course of their lifetime.

3. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to describe the process of establishing the role of CBOs in the provision of education for excluded children outside of school environments. The approaches chosen by CBOs have outlined the range of CBOs' work, from non-formal education to interventions with the vulnerable population and technological solutions. This paper has presented the manner in which CBOs can greatly improve education for the disadvantaged.

Thus, it can be asserted that CBOs might be one of the most valuable agents that can be empowered in the sphere of inclusion in education. This is true because of the target audiences, soft organizational structure, and control of the hard-to-reach populations: their efforts will be pivotal in fighting for social justice and equality in education. Nishimura (2017) asserts that CBOs prove useful where formal large-scale education systems cannot provide what is required, especially for poor children's learning.

Consequently, the implications of the findings of the present study can be considered important for the theory and practice of teaching in the framework of the principles of inclusive education. They doubt the normal patterns of imparting education and state that education should be normal in communities. Therefore, it is recommended that practitioners understand that interventions have to be situated, communities have to participate, and multi-sectoral collaboration is essential for inclusion in education.

Based on the arguments of this paper, the following actions are called upon by different stakeholders to enhance CBOs' supportive role in the delivery of inclusive education. Cultivating this type of positive policy towards CBO activities is recommended by encouraging positive policies and favorable funding by policymakers.

Education practitioners should try to find ways to involve CBOs due to their relative advantage. It is recommended that scholars should continue the study of the impact of inclusive education by CBOs beyond the project and improve research approaches.

As far as further work is concerned, one has to state that the concept of inclusive education undoubtedly goes beyond the model of school. CBOs of such a nature will prove to be even more vital in this broader definition of learning to support a system that is more open, flexible, and efficient in delivering education. Of course, there is a long list of challenges to overcome, but with these challenges comes the ability to develop solutions that benefit people. Thus, the engagement of CBOs in raising educational equity is going to be defined, and the possibilities of governmental establishments supporting it are to be introduced so that the goal of providing quality education for every learner with the account of his conditions and living background can be realized.

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