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MOBILISING INDIVIDUALS FOR POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

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I. Mobilization Concepts and Theories

In the context of social change, mobilisation refers to the process of inspiring, organising, and empowering individuals and communities to take collective action to achieve shared goals. In this section, we explore the concepts and theories that underpin mobilisation efforts and provide a theoretical basis for understanding the dynamics of collective action for social change.

Resource mobilisation theory emphasises the importance of different resources, such as financial, human, and social capital, in facilitating mobilisation efforts. It highlights the pivotal role of resource availability and allocation in enabling both individuals and organisations to engage effectively in collective action. McCarthy and Zald introduced a key terminology for this theory in their influential 1977 paper. They defined social movement organisations (SMOs) as groups working for social change, while a social movement industry (SMI) is a collection of organisations supporting for similar causes. For instance, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch would be classified as SMOs within the broader SMI of human rights organisations. SMOs actively seek adherents, who support the goals of movements, and constituents who actively participate in supporting the social movement through volunteering or financial contributions. McCarthy and Zald distinguished between those who directly benefit from a cause (regardless of their personal support for it) and those who do not personally benefit but support the cause based on their moral convictions.

According to sociologists, the types of resources needed by social movements can be grouped into five categories:

- a) Social-organisational resources: These resources refer to the means by which social movement organisations (SMOs) build their networks and connections, (an example of a social-organisational resource is the development of an email list consisting of individuals who support the cause). SMOs can use this resource for their own purposes and also share it with other like-minded SMOs.
- b) Material resources: These encompass tangible assets necessary for the functioning of an organisation. Including financial resources, physical supplies, and a dedicated space for organisational activities.
- c) Cultural resources: these involve the knowledge needed to manage the organisational activities effectively. Which includes skills such as lobbying elected representatives, drafting policy papers, and organising rallies. Cultural resources can also extend to media products, such as books or informative videos that relate to the organisation's work.
- d) Human resources: This refers to the labour (whether voluntary or paid), required to conduct the organisation's activities. Depending on the specific objectives of the organisation, particular skills may hold significant value as human

resources. For instance, an organisation aiming to improve healthcare access might prioritise the involvement of medical professionals, while one focused on immigration law may actively seek individuals with legal training.

- e) Moral resources: contribute to the perceived legitimacy of an organisation. Celebrity endorsements serve as a notable example of moral resources, as they can inspire individuals to learn more about the organisation, hold a more positive view of it, or even become adherents or constituents themselves.

By understanding and harnessing these various resources, social movements can enhance their capacity to achieve their objectives and mobilize support for their causes.

Social capital theory, on the other hand focuses on the social networks, trust, and norms that contribute to mobilisation. It is a structural concept referring to the ability of individuals or groups to use their social relations and positions in diverse social networks to access a variety of resources, and to accumulate a reservoir of accessible resources by consciously investing in social relations. Robert Putman defines social capital as: “... features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam, 1993: 167).

According to Putnam, social networks hold value, and social interactions impact the

effectiveness of individuals and groups. Social capital is closely connected to ‘civic virtue’, as the number of civic associations and the level of participation in these associations indicate the strength of social capital within a society. Social capital is intertwined with civic engagement, voluntary organisation involvement, and social connections, which foster strong norms of reciprocity and trust. Networks of civic engagement facilitate societal cooperation, coordination, and communication, reinforce reputations, and allow for the resolution of collective action dilemmas. Social capital affects the productivity of individuals and groups and possesses the characteristics of a public good. Being a collective entity, it cannot be converted into a private good. The stocks of capital, including trust, norms, and networks, accumulate through use and diminish when not actively employed.

Another significant contribution to social capital theory comes from Francis Fukuyama, who presents a more specific but distinct definition of social capital. He defines social capital in terms of trust, stating that it is the ability of people to collaborate for common purposes in groups and organisations. Additionally, he defines social capital as the presence of informal values or norms shared among group members that enable cooperation. Fukuyama asserts that interpersonal trust is essential for the emergence of social relationships. Mutual trust enhances cooperation, reduces transaction costs, and promotes business transactions. He places emphasis on qualities in social relationships, such as interpersonal trust,

reciprocity, shared norms, and understandings, which facilitate people's association with one another and contribute to the development of social capital.

Understanding motivation is pivotal in mobilisation efforts. The theory of self-determination examines the factors that drive individuals to participate in social change initiatives. It explores the connection between personality, human motivation, and optimal functioning. The theory posits the existence of two main types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, which encompasses a sense of justice, empathy, and personal fulfilment, often playing a significant role; and extrinsic motivation, which includes social recognition, incentives, and perceived rewards, and can also influence individual engagement. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are powerful forces that shape individuals' identities and behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Collective identity theory posits that individuals develop a shared sense of identity and belonging through mobilisation. This theory emphasises the importance of collective identities, shared values, and a sense of solidarity in mobilising individuals towards a common cause. It highlights the role of identity formation and social identification in shaping individual commitment and sustained engagement.

II. Social Change and Sustainable Development in Africa

Africa, with its diverse cultures, complex challenges, and vast potential, stands at a

critical juncture where mobilisation can be a powerful force for social change and sustainable development. The continent faces a range of interconnected issues, including poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and limited access to essential services such as education and healthcare. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that mobilises individuals and communities.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework for global development efforts, and their relevance to Africa is undeniable. The SDGs encompass various aspects of social, economic, and environmental development, aligning with the aspirations and priorities of African nations. Mobilisation plays a crucial role in achieving the SDGs, as it mobilises resources, knowledge, and collective action towards specific targets.

III. Mobilisation-Strategies: Global Perspectives and Adaptation to African Context

Mobilisation strategies employed globally offer valuable insights and perspectives that can be adapted to the African context. By examining successful mobilisation efforts from around the world, valuable lessons can be learned and applied to the unique challenges and opportunities present in Africa.

- Grassroots movements have emerged as powerful mobilisation strategies globally. These movements originate from the ground level, driven by local

grievances and aspirations. They emphasise community engagement, bottom-up approaches, and inclusive participation. Grassroots movements provide a platform for marginalised groups to voice their concerns, advocate for their rights, and mobilise support for social change.

- Advocacy campaigns have proven to be effective mobilisation strategies on a global scale. These campaigns use mainly strategic communication, awareness-raising activities, and targeted advocacy efforts to influence policies, shape public opinion, and mobilise support for social causes. Through effective messaging, storytelling, and the use of various media platforms, advocacy campaigns amplify the voices of marginalised communities and raise awareness about pressing social issues.
- The advancement of technology and digital platforms has revolutionised mobilisation efforts worldwide, presenting new opportunities for engagement and amplification of voices. Mobile phones and social media platforms have become powerful tools for communication, coordination, and organising campaigns. These technologies provide accessible and scalable platforms for mobilisers to reach a broader audience, facilitate grassroots movements, and mobilise support for social change.

IV. Adapting Mobilisation Strategies to the African Context

While drawing from global perspectives, it is crucial to adapt mobilisation strategies to the specific cultural, social, and political context of Africa. Successful mobilisation in Africa requires an understanding of the unique challenges, aspirations, and dynamics of the African communities.

- Cultural nuances play a significant role in mobilisation efforts, African societies are rich in diverse cultures, languages, and traditions. It is essential to respect and embrace these cultural differences while mobilising communities. Therefore, adapting mobilisation strategies to align with local customs and traditions ensures that initiatives are well-received and sustainable in the long run.
- Socio-political realities in Africa shape the landscape for mobilisation. Political dynamics, governance structures, and legal frameworks differ across African countries. It is fundamental to navigate these complexities, build relationships with relevant stakeholders, and work within the existing systems to achieve meaningful impact. For successful mobilisation efforts, it is crucial to engage with government institutions, civil society organisations, and community leaders.
- Working in partnership with local organisations, community leaders, and grassroots activists enhances the credibility, reach, and sustainability of mobilisation initiatives. By leveraging existing networks,

knowledge, and resources, partnerships contribute to a more holistic and impactful approach to mobilisation.

- Addressing issues of inclusivity and representation is critical in mobilising diverse African communities. Women, youth, marginalized groups, and minority populations often face unique challenges and barriers. Ensuring their meaningful participation, representation, and leadership in mobilisation efforts promote inclusivity, social justice, and equal opportunities for all.

V. Leveraging African Values and Traditional Systems

Leveraging African values and traditional systems can be a powerful mobilisation strategy in the African context. African societies have a rich heritage of communalism, collective decision-making, and ubuntu, emphasising the interconnectedness and shared responsibility of community members. Incorporating these values into mobilisation efforts fosters a sense of ownership, cooperation, and solidarity among individuals and communities.

Respecting and involving traditional leaders and institutions can significantly enhance mobilization efforts. Traditional leaders often hold significant influence and serve as trusted figures within their communities. Engaging them in dialogues, consultations, and decision-making processes strengthens

the legitimacy and acceptance of mobilisation initiatives.

Furthermore, mobilisation strategies should tap into existing community structures and organisations. Community-based organisations, faith-based groups, and cultural associations are already embedded within African communities and possess deep knowledge and connections. Collaborating with these entities enables mobilisers to leverage their networks, credibility, and community trust.

VI. Building Sustainable Organizational Structures and Networks

Building sustainable organisational structures and networks is crucial for the long-term impact and continuity of mobilisation efforts in Africa. Organisations involved in mobilisation should focus on capacity building, resource mobilisation, and institutional strengthening. By developing strong organisational foundations, mobilisation initiatives can maintain momentum, adapt to changing contexts, and continue to drive social change.

Collaborative networks and coalitions play a crucial role in mobilisation. By fostering partnerships and alliances with like-minded organisations, mobilisers can pool resources, share knowledge, and increase their collective impact. Collaborative networks improve coordination, facilitate joint advocacy, and promote learning among diverse stakeholders.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning are essential components of effective mobilisation. Regular assessment of the

impact and effectiveness of mobilisation strategies allows for adaptive learning and improvement. By embracing a culture of learning and evidence-based practice, mobilisation efforts become more responsive, accountable, and results-oriented.

VII. Success Factors and Challenges in Mobilising People for Social Change in Africa

Success factors in mobilising people for social change in Africa encompass a range of elements. Inclusive leadership, characterised by representation, diversity, and participatory decision-making, fosters a sense of ownership and trust among mobilised individuals. Community engagement and active participation are vital in ensuring that initiatives address local needs, aspirations, and priorities.

Building sustainable organisational structures and networks is essential for the long-term impact of mobilisation efforts. Collaboration between organisations, sharing resources, and engaging in knowledge exchange facilitate collective learning and amplify the impact of individual initiatives. Additionally, effective communication, both within the mobilisation efforts and with external stakeholders, is crucial for garnering support and maintaining momentum.

However, mobilisation efforts in Africa also face numerous challenges. Limited resources, including funding and infrastructure, can hinder the scale and sustainability of initiatives. Political barriers, such as restrictive laws, lack of

government support, and political instability, pose significant challenges to mobilisation. Additionally, social divisions, cultural prejudices, and historical legacies can impede collective action and undermine the effectiveness of mobilisation efforts.

VIII. The Role of Technology and Digital Platforms in Mobilisation Efforts

Technology and digital platforms have transformed mobilisation efforts globally, and their impact in Africa cannot be underestimated. Mobile phones have become ubiquitous, providing access to communication, information, and organising tools. Social media platforms offer avenues for sharing stories, organising campaigns, and mobilising support. Data-driven approaches enable evidence-based decision-making and facilitate targeted interventions.

However, it is important to recognise the digital divide and the challenges of technological access in certain African regions. Addressing issues of affordability, connectivity, and digital literacy is crucial to ensure that technology does not exacerbate existing inequalities. Moreover, concerns about data privacy, misinformation, and the manipulation of digital platforms highlight the need for ethical considerations and responsible use of technology in mobilisation efforts.

This part provides a comprehensive literature review, exploring the concepts, theories, and strategies related to mobilizing people in Africa for positive social change. It highlights the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Africa, emphasises

the importance of context-specific adaptation, and underscores the transformative potential of technology. Understanding these dimensions is crucial for designing effective mobilisation efforts that empower individuals and communities to drive sustainable development in Africa.

References:

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