

THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL ACTION  
IN COMMUNITY AND AREA DEVELOPMENT

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The success of any community or area development program depends in large part on how effectively the program mobilizes human and non-human resources in the action phases. If not carried through to action or completion the best plans are of little consequence; they accomplish little beyond providing a stimulating exercise for the planners. Mobilizing the resources of a community or area to achieve the objectives of development is a process of social action. Whether the project be a new golf course, an area vocational training school, a labor survey, a nursing home or a community education program the process of attaining the objective is social since it depends on motivating key people and organizations to participate actively in the action necessary to accomplish the development objectives. This chapter discusses the process of social action<sup>2</sup> and suggests how this process may be used most effectively by individuals and groups who choose to work toward bringing about certain changes in their community or area.

Changes in a community or area may result from forces within, from forces originating outside the community or area, or (as usually is the case) from both. Changes occurring as the result of outside forces are often not planned for by the system (organization, community, or area) undergoing change. In fact, most often these outside factors are beyond the direct control of the system. An example of the effect of such outside or external forces is the development of new agricultural technology which is persistently resulting in a reduction of the number of farms and farmers in Iowa. These forces will probably continue to have an effect regardless of the actions taken by the individual community or area. Indeed it is often the effect of such outside forces which prompts initiation of development projects and programs within areas and communities.

Since external forces are usually beyond the direct control of area residents this chapter focuses on those kinds of changes which can be planned and executed within the community or area. This does not mean, however, that resources used in carrying out an action program are limited to those available in the community. Many types of outside assistance may be sought and utilized.

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<sup>2</sup>/Those desiring a more detailed discussion of social action may want to read George M. Beal, "Social Action: Instigated Social Change in Large Social Systems" in James H. Copp, Our Changing Rural Society, Rural Sociological Society, Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, 1964, and George M. Beal, "How Does Social Change Occur?" in A Basebook for Agricultural Adjustment in Iowa, Part III, The Opportunities, Special Report 22, Iowa State College, October 1957, p. 17.

Purposive social action of the kind being stressed in this chapter will be referred to as "instigated change" in that it is purposely planned and executed. Those persons or groups who instigate the change will be referred to as change agents. The emphasis of the chapter will be on the process involved in any social action project and will not focus on any particular types of change. Social action projects may be instigated by a particular group or organization or may be undertaken on a community or area-wide basis. Groups, organizations, communities and in some cases areas have in common the fact that they are social systems. As used in this discussion a social system is a very general term and can mean any group of people who share some common interest and interact together over time. Within the framework of this definition a community, while being termed a social system, is composed of many different systems or sub-systems. This does not violate the definition; each individual is a member of many formal and informal social systems.

A social system is not limited to communities, however, and may include county, area and even state or national groups or organizations. The important feature is that the members of the system know about each other and take each other into account in their actions. Therefore a local PTA, Lion's Club, an informal coffee clique, a community, an area development committee or the state legislature may all be considered as examples of social systems. The definition of social systems is stressed here since it is social systems (at whatever level) which accomplish social action.

Planned, purposeful social action attempts to bring about social change which (it is assumed) maximizes satisfaction for a particular social system or systems. Instigated social action may be thought of as a process of deciding objectives, making choices concerning methods and involving people in carrying out the objectives. In this respect, social action is collective action -- although it does not deny the importance of individual or family decision-making units.

However, emphasis is placed on those types of decisions that man must make or prefers to make in harmony with the decisions of other groups of people in order to maximize his satisfactions. Man finds he is usually involved in many coordinate decisions in his neighborhood, formal groups, institutions, community, county, state and nation. It is to this larger decision-making "arena" that the term social action has been traditionally applied.

If decisions are made and action carried out regarding a community center, a hospital, united fund drive, school reorganization, government reorganization, or area development, at least the majority of the community or area leaders must coordinate their decisions and actions in order to attain the planned objective. Social action thus may be analyzed in terms of the flow, or stages, of social action over a period of time and the persons and social systems involved. Each of these three aspects will now be examined.

It has been found that successful and efficient social action projects usually do not just "happen" but are carefully conceived and planned. It has also been found by research and observation that successful social action projects tend to follow a certain identifiable sequence of steps. Certainly not all social action projects follow the same procedure from start to finish. But sufficient similarities have been noted to justify the discussion of social action in terms of a sequence of steps. Depending on the magnitude of the project, these steps may be highly formalized and easily identified or may blend into one another so that there is almost a continuous flow of action. The steps may not occur in the exact sequence stated -- but sometime during the program all of the functions explicit in the steps seem to get performed.

The particular construct or sequence of steps of social action presented here is not a magic formula which will insure success of any action program. Nor is it a set of directions to be followed meticulously. Rather certain tasks are emphasized which are important to accomplishing objectives, and these tasks are placed in a particular time sequence. The success of the action project depends in large part on how well each of these tasks is performed.

One of the major problems in applying this model or mental picture of social action is to describe these steps and determine at what point in time they should be taken. This poses a dilemma since in the real world some of the steps may not be taken in the stated sequence, may be taken more than once, may be taken simultaneously, or may in some cases be left out. The main purpose here is to identify the general nature of the steps in order that one may become aware of the part they play in total action and of the sequence in which they usually occur.

A brief description of each step will follow.

### Step 1: Analysis of the Existing Social System

All social action takes place within existing social systems. If the change agents (persons or groups) attempting to implement social action within some generally defined social system are to operate efficiently, it seems logical that they must understand the general social system within which the social action will take place, the important sub-systems within the general social system, and the extra-system influences upon the general social system and the sub-systems. Each community, for example, is made up of a multitude of social systems which together comprise a total community. These include the diversity of organizations serving the needs of businessmen, housewives, youth, senior citizens and various special interest groups within the community. The social systems comprising a community or the arena of social action are resources available to aid community action. Often a particular organization seeking to initiate some community action program becomes so involved that it fails to take into account various other interested organizations and groups in the community. At a minimum, analysis of the existing

social systems enables a broader understanding of the social environment in which the proposed action project will take place. Such an analysis will prove beneficial at various subsequent stages in the process of social action.

In addition to knowing what groups or organizations exist within a community or area, it is also important to understand something about the interrelationships between the systems. It is of particular importance to understand something about the goals and objectives and the purposes of each of these organizations along with their relative position of leadership (influence) in the total community or area. It is also important to know something about the groups and organizations to which key leaders in the community or area belong.

As an illustration, an area development committee seeking to initiate some project of social action may consider beginning with an inventory of the kinds of organizations included in the area and their potential interest in the kind of action program under consideration. Often it is easy for such committees to overlook important organizations and groups in the area from the standpoint of potential contribution to the success of social action projects.

### Step 2: Convergence of Interest

Social action begins when a problem is recognized, and defined as a need by two or more people, and a decision is made to act. Usually, the original convergence of interest on a problem involves only a few people. In the process of deciding to act, there must be at least some tentative definition of the problem, the goals to be attained, and decisions concerning means for action, even if only for "next step actions."

At this step, usually only a relatively few people are involved. The idea for the project may come about as a result of an informal discussion among a few community leaders, or may be an outgrowth of a meeting of a particular group or organization. In any event at this step, few people are involved and only highly tentative plans are made for the continuance or completion of the project.

### Step 3: Analysis of the Prior Social Situation

In any social system certain leadership patterns, power relations, methods and attitudes probably have developed out of the past experience with similar problems, projects or activities. Certain patterns of communication, cooperation and conflict have probably emerged. Certain methods, appeals, and organizational structures have worked; others have failed.

At this stage, the change agents need to ask and seek the answers to several questions.

a. Has there been any experience in the community or area with the kind of project being proposed? Was it successful? If so, is it possible to determine what factors contributed to the success? If it wasn't successful, why not? The intent of these questions is to capitalize on past experiences in the community or area to provide insight concerning where emphasis may be required to improve the chances of success in the anticipated social action projects.

b. What methods have become traditional in the community or area? Have most action projects succeeded in the past because of the efforts of a few individuals or organizations or have they involved a majority of the people in the community or area?

c. What is the general attitude in the community (area) concerning progress? Is there a defeatist attitude or are people looking for ways to improve the community?

d. What groups or organizations seem to work together best? Is there ill feeling between some organizations which may prevent them from working together on a community wide project?

By answering the above questions the change agents (planning group) can gain a better understanding of the prior social situation in the community and use this information in developing plans for proceeding with the proposed project.

#### Step 4: Delineation of Relevant Social Systems

Very few action programs directly involve all groups and organizations in the particular community or area in which action takes place. With the information and knowledge acquired in the preceding three steps, it should be possible to identify and describe the social systems most pertinent to the action program under consideration.

There are several criteria which may be used to decide which systems are relevant to the proposed action program. First we might ask which groups in the community are, or have in their membership, the people to be reached with the program -- the target systems. If the proposed project is a community youth center, then at a minimum all youth organizations in the community become relevant to this particular project.

Second, to what degree do the various groups or social systems in the community represent the needs and interests of the people of the community (area) or a particular organization that is the target system?

A third important criterion relates to the legitimation process. Although certain key leaders (influentials) and/or organizations may not be directly involved in the proposed action program, they may be important to the legitimation of the project.

Without the approval and support of such individuals or organizations, it may be difficult to gain widespread participation and cooperation in the community. Thus organizations or individuals having legitimation power should be considered as relevant to the project regardless of whether or not they actively participate in other stages of the process. More will be said about the process of legitimation later in the discussion.

A fourth criterion of relevancy is related to the extent to which a group might possibly be actively involved in planning, sponsoring or in other ways participating in the proposed project or program. It is important to identify as relevant not only those groups or organizations which express active interest, but also those who have the potential for involvement.

It is not only important to identify those groups which would probably favor the proposed action program, but it is also important to identify as "relevant" those systems which may oppose the plan. Taking potential opposition into account from the very start of a program will enable plans and strategies to be developed to counter the opposition when it arises. It is equally important to identify the probable issues and causes of opposition which may arise. It is possible that the planned program may conflict with the goals and objectives of some organizations or groups in the community or area.

Groups both inside and outside the community or area should be identified as relevant if they may be involved in a resource or consulting capacity. Change agents may desire to prepare a list of outside resources (organizations, agencies or individuals) which could be involved in the proposed program and to indicate the role they may play.

The tentative delineation of relevant groups allows the planners to begin to narrow down the systems listed in Step 1, so that limited resources of time and personnel may be used more effectively. As social action progresses from one step to another, certain systems may drop out of the "relevant" classification, others may have to be added.

#### Step 5: Initiating Sets

At this stage, it is quite probable that only a relatively few individuals or groups have been involved in the proposed action program. The task in Step 5 now becomes one of limited initiation of action. The action envisaged at this stage is of the "sounding board," information-gathering and legitimation nature. There usually emerges a small group or groups of people who attempt to involve other individuals or groups in the action process. (On the basis of the relevant groups and influential leaders delineated in Step 4.)

"Initiating sets" (individuals or groups) are chosen to contact other individuals and/or groups for their suggestions and sanction. (See Step 6: Legitimation.)

Thus, the initiating set is a group of persons (probably including the change agents previously involved) who are centrally interested in consulting with the key leaders of the relevant social systems. In this sense the initiating set is "organized" to perform these "sounding-board," consulting and legitimating functions.

As a result of the reactions of several leaders and organizations, the initial project idea may be modified to incorporate some of their suggestions and opinions. Throughout the social action process attention should be devoted to the possibility of including additional ideas to strengthen the proposed project and to increase its likelihood of success.

Depending on its magnitude, the proposed project may be initiated very quickly with relatively few people involved, or getting it "off the ground" may be a major hurdle requiring considerable organization and effort. As a rule, the more complex the proposed project, the more effort will be required in initiation.

At this step it is essential that accurate and complete communication take place with individuals who become a part of the initiator sets. Often misunderstandings as a result of poor or inadequate communication can create problems and even opposition to the proposed project. Consequently, it is critical that the proposed project idea be explained carefully and completely.

#### Step 6: Legitimation

Legitimation is used here mainly in the sense of giving sanction (authority, justification or "license to act") for action. It is recognized that final legitimation for any action program rests with the majority of the people in the relevant social system. It is also recognized that in most social systems there are certain key people who have the power of legitimation for most action programs effecting their particular organization or following or in many cases in action programs involving the whole community or area. There is usually a formal legitimation structure (e. g. elected officers in positions of authority in relevant groups) and an informal legitimation structure (e. g. informal leaders in positions of influence that may be even more important than the formal legitimizers.) The process of legitimation is especially important for action programs initiated by voluntary non-legal authority groups.

Perhaps the criteria for deciding which persons or organizations are legitimizers may be found in the following questions: "Is this an individual (or organization) who, if he opposed our particular plan, would make it quite difficult to succeed because of the weight of his opinions with other members of the social system?" Or conversely, "If this individual (or organization) gives his sanction to our proposal, will it greatly enhance the likelihood of its (the project's) success?"

In some communities it is possible that basically the same group of influentials are informal legitimizers for nearly every kind of community project undertaken.

However, in most communities the persons or organizations in a legitimation role will vary with the type of project undertaken. That is to say, the persons who are influential in matters pertaining to schools may not be as influential (and hence not legitimizers) for projects involving public services, e. g. streets and roads, water systems, local government, etc., or projects oriented toward bringing new industry into town.

Usually legitimizers will be influential in community affairs but may not be particularly active in community organizations. They may have been active at one time but may have semi-retired from active organizational work and other positions of formal leadership.

Legitimation at this stage of the planning process consists of consultation with the formal and informal leaders of the previously specified relevant groups, organizations and individuals. The resource of access is important at this stage. The fact that different individuals will possess different access to relevant leaders and influentials may make it necessary to form several contact groups (initiating sets.) With reference to the comments made above, it is important to note that in most cases both formal and informal leaders should be contacted for their reactions and suggestions on the proposed program. Such an approach would tend to gain the approval of leaders for the program as well as obtaining additional suggestions for changes and how the program might be carried out.

Many kinds of action programs or projects require not only informal sanctions of the community and relevant organization leaders, but also formal approval of some legal or governing body. Such is the case with projects such as hospitals and city and county zoning where certain legal requirements must be met. Both kinds of legitimation are equally important but may differ in the way the task of legitimation is approached and carried out.

Reactions from legitimizers vary. They may range from flat refusal to endorse the project on the one hand to wanting to become the center of the promotional activity on the other. Moreover, this caution should be observed: legitimizers often will put forth no effort to help initiate or carry on the action program. They are not necessarily an important resource in subject matter competence, time or energy. However, if legitimation is not obtained from them, they may throw all of their resources into blocking the program. An over-simplified reason for such action is their feeling that if they are bypassed on legitimation often enough, they cease to be legitimizers, a status and role they may desire to retain.

This step has been discussed at length, because it is highly important in the process of social action. If it is not carried out successfully, it can have a serious effect on the probability of success of the proposed action program. The converse is also true! Therefore, careful planning is required to make sure that this step is successful. It is at this step that many key leaders are first contacted about the proposed project and their subsequent expectations, attitudes and actions

in relation to the initiating group will be influenced by this contact. Again, emphasis should be placed on insuring communication.

### Step 7: Diffusion Sets

Thus far, the existence of the problem, the recognition of need, the motivation to act and legitimation have involved only a small group of people. However, if other individuals and relevant groups and organizations are to act, they must be given an opportunity or be "convinced" of the existence of the problem, believe a need exists and be willing to act. At this step, there is a need for people who can provide the kinds of resources needed to inform the community or larger area system about the proposed project and give community residents an opportunity to express their opinions. These resources include time, communication skills, organizational skills, access to many people or groups, etc. This step is launched, however, only after the successful completion of the preceding steps.

There appears to be two different aspects of this step. First, the diffusion groups must make some major decisions relative to the program before carrying out this step. Such decisions may take into consideration the suggestions and reactions of the consultants and/or legitimizers in the preceding step. It may be pointed out in relation to this aspect that between each step of process the planners should evaluate their progress and use this evaluation in planning alternative courses of action in terms of undertaking the next step. This periodic evaluation of progress in relation to plans can provide important insights and information to guide the project on through the remaining steps of the process. It is also vitally important that the initiators of the project develop alternative courses of action for accomplishing each step. By doing so, momentum will not be lost should the chosen course of action fail. A sound principle for social action may be stated as P<sup>5</sup> -- Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance.

A second aspect of this step is preparation to disseminate or diffuse the basic ideas of the program to various target groups and audiences. This aspect of Step 7 is related to the point mentioned above because content and plans to diffuse the ideas of the new program should be based on these major decisions. At this point persons are involved who can best diffuse the essential ideas of the proposed program to relevant target systems. This may include such people as newspaper editors and other persons associated with mass media as well as other individuals and groups who are in a position accurately to inform relatively large numbers of people. The people who perform this function are called diffusion sets. It is obvious that there may be a need for many different combinations of people or completely different diffusion sets as well as different methods and means developed as the process is carried out with various relevant target groups. It is important to bear in mind that the same method of diffusion (or communication) will not be equally effective with all target groups. Therefore, it will be necessary to plan this step so that those methods will be used which will be most effective in reaching various target audiences. This decision must be made in large part on the basis

of the characteristics of the groups and organizations to be informed. An individual who has been highly successful in conducting social action programs has made the statement that "people are made aware by impersonal methods of communication (newspapers, postcards, etc.) but they are only persuaded or convinced by face-to-face contact." This is an important principle to keep in mind as social action proceeds.

At this point, it should be emphasized that each of the steps of the process are only functions to be performed and that key people identified at each step may perform more than one function. To illustrate, newspaper editors were referred to above as a possible diffusion set. This does not mean, however, that the newspaper editor may not be a legitimizer or initiator, or aid in the performance of any other step in the process.

There may be a considerable overlap in terms of the people involved in various functions, or it could be possible that different groups of people are involved at each step. Usually continuity is built into social action programs by certain people continuing to play various roles at a number of stages. However, two important points may be made here: (1) certain people have specialized skills and may be most effective at only certain steps in the process; many of these people prefer to play specialized roles and will not become involved if they have to continue all the way through the action program; (2) certain people try to play roles at which they are not skilled and thus hinder rather than aid the program.

#### Step 8: Definition of Need by More General Relevant Groups and Organizations

At this stage the activities planned by the diffusion sets are carried out to educate or convince the relevant social systems that a problem exists and that there is a need for their action. Thus it becomes the "people's problem." It is at this stage that the activities of the diffusion set usually attempt to broadly involve relevant individuals, groups and publics. The purpose, of course, is to convince the relevant social systems of the need for the proposed project. The process can be as simple as providing a social situation in which individuals' felt needs are channeled into a general consensus. However, in most cases, this step involves detailed and lengthy activities before the degree and amount of "felt need" is developed which will lead to action. In essence, this step is an outgrowth and continuation of the activity of diffusion sets.

There are many techniques and methods which have proved to be successful in obtaining a "felt need" regarding a problem. Some of these techniques are listed and elaborated below:

a. Basic education. Often times the problem toward which the proposed action program is directed may not be readily apparent to many people. Even upon recognition of the problem, it is quite probable that many people may not recognize the logic

of the proposed program for solution of the problem. In these kinds of situations basic education is an effective but time consuming technique for obtaining support for the proposed project.

Often times people are opposed to social changes in the community primarily because of traditional attitudes and a desire to maintain the status quo. In such cases basic education concerning the broader social and economic effects on the community may be necessary to change such attitudes.

A program of basic education must be supported by objective information and facts concerning both the problem and the proposed solution to it. In addition, it is important to involve people who are skilled in presenting facts, and who are perceived as being unbiased and objective by other community members.

This method is oriented toward creating a climate of acceptability for the proposed action project. However, it is reiterated that it is a time consuming task to change attitudes and opinions which have been held for a long time. In approaching this method, it is important to bear in mind that people believe what they see and see what they believe.

There are many kinds of projects requiring very little basic education. However, a project such as an area vocational or technical training school may require an extensive program of basic education (on population change, employment opportunities for young people, our educational system, methods of tax support and financing, etc.) before it may be defined as a need.

b. Surveys or Questionnaires. A survey or questionnaire distributed either to a sample or to the total population of the relevant social systems can be of value in several different ways. First, the survey may enable the initiators and/or planners to determine to what extent people define the proposed project or program as a need. It can also elicit suggestions and ideas from the people concerning how the project may be carried out. The results of the survey may indicate that a basic education program is needed to help define the need for the proposed project.

Secondly, a survey or questionnaire may be a method of basic education itself. In the process of completing the questionnaire a person thinks about the problem toward which the survey is directed and, at the same time, possible solutions to the problem. In a sense the individual "educates" himself in the process of completing the questionnaire.

Another by-product of the survey or questionnaire method is that it can serve as an important diffusion technique. As people complete the questionnaire they may begin thinking and talking to others -- not only about the questionnaire but about the proposed action program as well.

The survey or questionnaire method has the advantages indicated above, but at the same time may be a major project in and of itself. Successfully conducting,

analyzing and interpreting the results of a survey may require considerable technical assistance from outsiders.

Before deciding on the use of the survey method planners and initiators need to consider its advantages and disadvantages and weigh these against other methods of need definition.

c. Comparison and Competition. In American society, with the emphasis that is placed on friendly competition, comparison and/or competition can be effective in defining the need for the proposed project. If a certain community is considering the possibility of a swimming pool, in gaining support for the idea it may be sufficient to point out that a neighboring community has one.

However, it should perhaps be stated that if some action program is carried out only to "keep up with or ahead of the Joneses," there are possibilities of discontent or lack of support for the project after it is completed. For this reason it is probably better to use this method in conjunction with a basic education program so that relevant systems are really convinced of the importance of the project.

d. Exploiting Crisis Situations. It is probably safe to say that in many smaller communities that a fire truck may have been purchased after a major fire. Often it is difficult to obtain support for a project until some event occurs which brings the need dramatically and suddenly to the minds of people. In short, they are in a proper mental set to act.

It is not suggested that major crises be deliberately staged as a method of need definition. However, it is axiomatic that such situations create an atmosphere for immediate action.

However, it is possible that some community problems may be more grave than is generally recognized. Often problems may develop so slowly that people are relatively unaware of them. The potential gravity of such problems may be pointed out in a basic education program, creating a feeling of urgency to act on the part of relevant social systems. Again, the emphasis should be placed on rational and objective methods of communication rather than highly emotional appeals. Commitments made on the basis of emotional appeals tend to be shorter in duration than those based on objective information and analysis.

e. Channeling Complaints or Gripes. Often there are situations in communities or organizations which cause people frequently to express complaints or gripes. This, of course, is an indication of dissatisfaction and a potential willingness to take action to change the situation. The missing factor in such situations is unification behind a particular program designed to alleviate the dissatisfactions. The central idea behind this method is to point out how the proposed project may serve as a complete or partial solution to the situation giving rise to the complaints, to channel the complaints into support for the proposed project.

As an illustration, community people may be complaining about juvenile delinquency and a lack of activities and facilities for young people. These kinds of complaints may be turned into support for a community center if such a center is demonstrated to be at least a partial solution to the situation about which people are complaining.

Again, it is stressed that this may be only one of several methods used to gain support for the proposed action project.

f. Demonstration or Trial. Often there is resistance to a proposal because of a feeling that the idea "won't work in this community (area or organization)." In such cases it is often beneficial to give the proposal a short-term trial in the community to demonstrate its advantages. Of course, this only works for certain kinds of projects which lend themselves to short-term trial.

Perhaps many community members are not sure of the need for or effectiveness of a summer recreation program for youth. Some organization may want to sponsor and staff it for one year -- a "trial run." At the end of the year the community can decide if it is worth its resources to continue it.

Demonstration of how a particular project might work may also be accomplished by arranging tours of some key leaders to other communities or areas which may have the kind of program or project being proposed. There is obviously a limitation in the number of people who could be involved in such tours.

It may be desired to invite representatives of other communities or areas to share their experiences in similar projects as a part of a program of basic education. It is often advantageous to utilize such outside resource persons. They may be perceived as being more objective because they are not residents of the community and aligned with any particular group or project.

All of the above are methods which can be used to help stress and define the need for a particular action program on the part of relevant social systems. Each of the above has certain advantages. Decisions on which will be used should be based on: (1) the kind of project and (2) the nature and characteristics (including level of knowledge and attitudes) of the audience it is desired to convince of the importance of the proposed project. The planners and initiators of the project will probably not rely on any single method, but will probably use several in combination. Of course, the above list of methods is not exhaustive, and there may be many other effective techniques for gaining broader social system support for the proposed project.

#### Step 9: Decisions (Commitment) to Action by Relevant Systems

One might question why this step has been included, for in a real sense one's decision to act may be implicit in one's decision that a problem exists and urgently needs to be solved. However, this step is included to emphasize the importance of

getting not only tacit agreement that the problem exists and needs to be solved, but also to commit people to act in relation to the problem. Since it is necessary to have the active cooperation and participation of relatively large numbers of people to carry out most community action programs, it is very important to obtain overt commitments to assist at this stage. There is greater probability of action occurring when the commitment is made overtly before other persons and social pressure exists to perform in relation to the overt commitment. These commitments may include pledges of time, money or other resources at appropriate times as the project progresses. Psychological commitment is very important -- an expression of willingness to pitch in and work or back the program.

These commitments to assist in various ways are important to the planners and/or initiators of the project at this stage. They determine what resources and assistance can be counted on. They determine whether these will be sufficient to carry out the project at the level planned. Lack of sufficient commitment to action at this point to carry out the project as planned may indicate that the problem and its proposed solution have not been sufficiently well defined. This would, of course, mean that additional effort will have to be expended on the "definition of need" step of the process.

#### Step 10: Formulation of Objectives

It may seem rather curious to think that the project has developed to this step without objectives. It hasn't. Many short run and intermediate goals have been developed and met up to this point. However, it is quite probable that in involving the relevant publics, the idea or proposal has been stated rather generally with no particular attempt to define the objective clearly and precisely. In the public education program, in discussion and debate, the original goals may have been changed, modified or improved. Thus it is at this step (after a problem has been defined and a need to solve the problem recognized) that the goal or objective should be formalized and stated explicitly.

Although the need for doing this is apparently obvious, it is frequently bypassed, and people tend to skip directly to a discussion of the means and methods of solving the generally defined problem. It is especially important to insure that all relevant groups and organizations have the same understanding of what the objective is. The importance of consensus of opinion concerning objectives at this step cannot be over-emphasized.

It is possible that the objective may have been explicitly stated in the definition of need and commitment to act. In that case, a restatement of the objective may be all that is needed. This is particularly true of tangible, visible sorts of projects like new swimming pools, court houses, schools, etc. However, many action projects are more complex (such as school reorganizations, industrial development, etc.) and require explicit formulation of objectives at this stage.

In more complex action programs there may be more than one objective. Some of these may be immediate or short run while others may be more general or long run. As an illustration, a community or area may wish to improve its economic base. This would be a general or long run objective. To do this, they may wish to work toward the attraction of industry to the community. To do this, the decision may be made to form an industrial development corporation. This may be considered as an intermediate objective. However, in order to set up such a corporation, the decision may be made to try to raise \$20,000 within the community to establish such a corporation. This then becomes the immediate or short-run objective toward which the social action program is directed. It is often of value to state the objectives of an action program in such a sequence so that the more general objective is not lost sight of in the details of carrying out the immediate project.

#### Step 11: Decision on Means to be Used

Once objectives are set (agreed upon and formalized), there is need to explore alternative means and their consequences that might be used to reach these objectives. Then from the range of possible means available, a decision has to be made on which one or ones will be used to attain the objectives.

Most usually, it is easier for people to decide on objectives than it is for them to reach agreement concerning how the objectives will be accomplished. It may be generally agreed by a congregation that a new church is needed, but there may be considerable difference of opinion concerning what methods will be used to raise the money for the church or the architectural design of the church.

As in the case of objectives, it is very important that a consensus of opinion be reached among the relevant social systems concerning the means to be used to attain the defined objective.

At this stage, it is very important to have sound information and facts concerning various alternative methods. This will require anticipation of the kinds of information and facts which may be needed.

Who actually makes the final decision concerning means will vary from situation to situation. It may be a committee selected for this purpose, it may be the planners or initiators of the action project, or any one of several combinations of individuals or social systems. The important consideration is that as an end result there is agreement among the relevant systems concerning the means to be employed.

#### Step 12: Plan of Work

Within the framework of decisions made concerning objectives and general means, a more specific series of actions are planned formally or informally.

Decisions on organizational structure, designation of responsibilities, training, timing, planning of specific activities, etc., are all part of this step. A formally stated plan of work usually includes the following elements:

- a. Objectives to be accomplished -- these usually correspond to the group's short-term, intermediate and long-term objectives stated in a logically related fashion.
- b. Means to be used -- such a statement usually includes a statement of the general means to be used and in addition, a more detailed description of specific methods and actions to be taken.
- c. The organizational structure, authority patterns and the persons and groups responsible for actions to be taken.
- d. Training required to enable those responsible to accomplish the actions to which they are assigned.
- e. Additional specification of time sequence.

An important part of the plan of work is the statement of the organizational structure. Such a statement should include role descriptions, the lines of authority and the authority and responsibility of each person or group. In essence, the plan of work summarizes the objectives, means and commitments to action and places them in proper time sequence for carrying out the action process.

### Step 13: Mobilizing Resources

Within the framework of the plan of work, attention must be given to obtaining and organizing the resources to carry out the program. The fact that this step calls not only for mobilizing but for organizing should be emphasized. It is recognized that for a program to reach this point, there has been a great deal of mobilization and organization of resources. However, this step refers specifically to the mobilization and organization of the resources for carrying out the plan of work.

The plan of work usually calls for the mobilization of many different kinds of resources -- human, physical facilities, financial, communication, etc.

If the preceding 12 steps have been adequately performed, the mobilization of resources needed to accomplish the objective should be relatively easy. The project to this point has been carefully planned and legitimized; relevant systems have been convinced of the need for the project and committed to act in relation to it. This step then should be the "pay-off" of all the work and planning that has gone into the project up to this point.

#### Step 14: Action Steps

It is at this point that the plan of work (and available resources) are put to work to carry out the actual project mentioned above. The ease with which this stage is accomplished will depend in large part on how effectively the preceding steps have been carried out.

It is important to bear in mind that coordination and leadership are required to insure smooth implementation of the project.

#### Step 15: Evaluation

One of the most important steps of the process of social action actually comes after the completion of the project. Since this will probably not be the last action project carried out in the community or area, it is beneficial to build on past experience and gain new insights concerning future action programs. It is at this stage of the process that answers need be sought for the questions:

- (1) If our project was successful, why was it successful?
- (2) If it failed, why did it fail?

This final evaluation and analysis of the process is probably the most frequently overlooked step in the whole process and can be one of the most beneficial.

Specifically, final evaluation usually gives attention to whether stated objectives were satisfactorily attained and the satisfaction with objectives which were accomplished. Likewise, consideration should be given to the adequacy of the means used to achieve the group's objectives as to the adequacy of the organizational structure and group processes involved in carrying out the program.

The adage that "experience can be an excellent teacher" is perhaps a sound logic for final evaluation.

#### Summary

Most community action projects are probably accomplished following a procedure outlined above. The procedure does not necessarily point out any new concepts, but does highlight those steps which are most essential in successful social action projects.

Because the steps in the process were presented in a chronological order does not necessarily mean that all steps must be performed in this exact sequence in

order for the project to be successful. The steps and their order are a suggested guideline and not a rigid formula to be followed. However, the process presented has been tested and researched; in most cases it will probably best be applied in the order presented.

In utilizing the process of social action at least three ideas are central to its effective application. Throughout the process attention needs to be devoted to: (a) complete and accurate communication, (b) periodic evaluation of progress at each stage, and (c) careful planning of following steps.

The reader is again reminded of the limitations of the construct of social action as discussed in the introduction to this chapter. At this stage of development it appears to be a valuable tool. It is a framework in which to place individuals and social systems in order more accurately to identify the types of resources needed and functions to be performed over time in successful social action.