

Nature and Scope of Community Organisation

Introduction

Community Organisation is one of the most important methods of social work. It is a planned and purposeful process through which people of a community are brought together to identify their common problems, use their local strengths, and work collectively to improve their lives and their surroundings.

Murray G. Ross (1967) defines community organisation as -

A process by which a community identifies its needs or objectives, gives priority to them, develops confidence and will to work at them, finds resources (internal and external) to deal with them, and in doing so, extends and develops cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community”

It is not just about forming committees or holding meetings. It is about **building people's power** — so that they can speak for themselves, solve their own problems, and create lasting change in their community.

To understand community organisation deeply, we need to study its **nature** — what it is and how it works — and its **scope** — where and how far it can be applied.

Nature of Community Organisation

1. People-Centred Process

At the heart of community organisation are the **people themselves** — not the social worker, not the government, not the NGO. The community members are the main actors. The social worker is only a guide or a facilitator.

The needs, problems, and aspirations of the people determine the direction of the entire process. People are not treated as passive receivers of help — they are treated as capable human beings who have the strength to change their own situation when given the right support.

Example: When a social worker enters a tribal village facing water scarcity, they do not come with a ready-made solution. Instead, they sit with the villagers, listen to them, and help them decide together what needs to be done and how.

2. Democratic in Nature

Community organisation is built on the values of **democracy** — every person has a voice, every person matters. Decisions are made collectively through discussion, not imposed from above. Local leaders are elected by the community, not appointed by outsiders.

This democratic spirit ensures that the process is fair, transparent, and owned by the people. It builds a culture where even the most marginalised person — a woman, a Dalit, a daily wage worker — feels that their opinion counts.

Example: In a community meeting about building a new school, every family — rich or poor — gets to speak and vote. The final decision belongs to the community, not to any single authority.

3. Goal-Oriented Process

Community organisation is never random or casual. It always works toward a **clear goal** — solving a specific problem, meeting a community need, or bringing about a desired change. Every activity, every meeting, and every effort is purposefully directed toward that goal.

At the same time, goals can change as the situation changes. Once one goal is achieved, the community moves on to the next challenge. This keeps the process alive and meaningful.

Example: A community in a slum first organises to demand clean drinking water. Once that is achieved, they set a new goal — proper street lighting and drainage. The goal-oriented nature keeps the community motivated and moving forward.

4. Process of Empowerment

One of the most important aspects of community organisation is that it **empowers people**. Empowerment means helping people develop confidence, skills, awareness, and the ability to take control of their own lives and decisions.

Community organisation does not create dependence on the social worker or the government. Instead, it builds the community's own capacity — so that even after the social worker leaves, the community can continue to solve problems on its own.

Example: Through SEWA's community organisation work, poor women who once had no voice in their households or workplaces became confident leaders who ran cooperatives, spoke in public, and negotiated with government officials. That is empowerment in the truest sense.

5. Flexible in Approach

Community organisation does not follow a fixed or rigid formula. Every community is different — different problems, different culture, different resources, different people. Therefore, the approach must be **flexible and adaptable** to the specific needs and reality of each community.

What works in an urban slum may not work in a remote tribal village. A good social worker understands this and adjusts their methods accordingly, without forcing a pre-designed plan on the community.

Example: In an urban community, awareness campaigns might use social media and public meetings. In a remote rural community, the same awareness might be spread through folk songs, street plays, and local festivals. The goal is the same — the method changes.

6. Based on Collective Action

Community organisation believes that **unity is strength**. Individual efforts have limits. But when people come together — sharing a common identity, a common problem, and a common goal — their collective power is far greater than any one person acting alone.

Collective action creates pressure, visibility, and momentum. It shows authorities and society that a large number of people are affected and are determined to bring about change.

Example: One family complaining about open drains may be ignored by the municipality. But when fifty families from the same neighbourhood come together, sign a petition, and meet the municipal officer collectively — it becomes very hard to ignore them.

7. Dynamic in Nature

Community organisation is not a static or one-time activity. It is **constantly changing and evolving** — responding to new problems, new challenges, and new opportunities. As the community grows and changes, so does the nature of its organisation.

A community that once organised for basic needs like water and sanitation may later organise for education, employment, or political rights. The process is always moving, always adapting, always growing.

Example: The women's movement in India began with basic demands for safety and legal protection. Over time it grew into a dynamic movement addressing education, economic rights, political representation, and gender equality — constantly evolving in response to new realities.

8. Educational in Nature

Community organisation is deeply **educational** — not in the classroom sense, but in the sense of raising awareness. Through the process of coming together, discussing problems, and planning action, people learn about their rights, their responsibilities, and the social systems around them.

They develop critical thinking — the ability to question why things are the way they are and imagine how they could be better. This education is perhaps more powerful than any formal schooling because it comes from lived experience.

Example: When women in a rural community participate in an awareness campaign about their legal rights under the Domestic Violence Act, they are not just gaining information — they are gaining the power to protect themselves. That is education through community organisation.

9. Based on Local Resources

Community organisation strongly believes in **using what the community already has** before looking for outside help. Every community has local resources — knowledgeable elders, energetic youth, women's groups, local skills, cultural traditions, and informal networks.

When these local resources are identified and activated, the community develops a sense of ownership and self-reliance. Outside help is welcome, but it should support — not replace — local strengths.

Example: In many villages, community health programmes have been successfully run by training local women as health workers — using their existing relationships and trust within the community as the most valuable resource. No outsider could have been as effective.

Scope of Community Organisation

The scope of community organisation refers to the wide range of areas and situations where it can be applied. It is not limited to any one type of community or any one type of problem.

In Rural Communities — community organisation addresses problems like poverty, landlessness, lack of healthcare, water scarcity, illiteracy, and caste discrimination. It helps build Gram Sabhas, women's collectives, and farmer groups.

In Urban and Slum Communities — it addresses unemployment, poor housing, lack of sanitation, child labour, and exclusion from government services. It builds resident welfare associations and neighbourhood committees.

In the Field of Education — community organisation helps in increasing school enrolment, reducing dropout rates, and demanding better school infrastructure by involving parents, teachers, and local leaders together.

In the Field of Health — it organises communities for awareness about hygiene, nutrition, immunisation, maternal health, and mental health — making health a community responsibility rather than just a government programme.

In Women's Empowerment — through Self Help Groups, cooperatives, and awareness campaigns, community organisation builds women's economic independence, social confidence, and political participation.

In Disaster Management — community organisation helps in preparedness, quick response, and long-term rehabilitation by building strong local networks that can act fast in times of crisis.

In Environmental Protection — it organises communities to protect forests, water bodies, and natural resources — as seen in movements like Chipko and the Silent Valley movement.

In Addressing Social Discrimination — community organisation brings together marginalised groups like Dalits, Adivasis, and persons with disabilities to collectively demand dignity, rights, and equal treatment.

Conclusion

Community organisation is one of the most powerful and meaningful methods of social work because it is rooted in the belief that **people have the capacity to change their own lives when they come together**. Its nature — people-centred, democratic, empowering, flexible, collective, dynamic, educational, and locally grounded — makes it relevant in every type of community and every kind of social problem.

Its scope is vast — from a small village demanding clean water to a national movement demanding constitutional rights. Whether the problem is small or large, local or structural, community organisation provides the framework and the spirit to face it with collective strength and dignity.

As Mahatma Gandhi believed — real change comes not from the top, but from the people themselves. Community organisation is the method that makes that belief a reality.