

# Steps in Community Organisation

## Introduction

Community organisation is a planned and systematic process. It does not happen overnight. It moves step by step — from understanding the community to empowering it to solve its own problems. Each step is important and builds on the previous one.

Just like a doctor first diagnoses the patient before giving medicine, a social worker first studies the community, understands its problems, builds relationships, and then works with the people toward change.

These steps ensure that community organisation is **purposeful, democratic, people-centred, and effective**.

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## Step 1 — Entry into the Community

The first and one of the most important steps is **entering the community** in the right way. How a social worker enters a community determines whether people will trust them or not.

The social worker must enter with **humility and openness** — not as an expert who has come to solve problems, but as a learner who has come to understand. They must respect the local culture, traditions, and values of the community.

In this step, the worker introduces themselves, spends time in the community, participates in local activities, and slowly builds initial relationships with community members, local leaders, and key informants.

**This step is about building trust — and without trust, nothing else is possible.**

*Example:* A social worker entering a Dalit basti for the first time does not call a big meeting on day one. Instead, they visit homes, sit with people, share tea, attend local events, and slowly become a familiar and trusted face before any formal work begins.

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## Step 2 — Community Study and Social Investigation

Once the social worker has built initial trust, the next step is to **deeply study and understand the community**. This is like conducting a social survey or investigation to gather information about:

The **geographical and physical features** of the community — its location, size, and living conditions. The **social composition** — castes, religions, tribes, gender groups, and their relationships. The **economic conditions** — sources of income, levels of poverty, employment patterns. The **existing problems** — what issues are the people facing and how severely. The **existing resources** — what local organisations, leaders, skills, and government schemes are already present. The **power structure** — who holds power in the community and how decisions are made.

This study can be done through **interviews, observation, focus group discussions, informal conversations, and existing records**.

*Example:* Before starting a programme in a rural village, a social worker spends two to three weeks talking to farmers, women, youth, and elders — separately and together — to build a complete picture of the community's strengths, problems, and potential.

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## Step 3 — Identification of Problems and Needs

After studying the community, the social worker works with the people to **identify and prioritise their problems and needs**. This is a very important step because the problems must come from the community — not be imposed by the outsider.

Often a community has many problems. The task here is to help people **discuss, reflect, and decide** which problem is most urgent, most common, and most solvable with the resources available.

Problems can be **felt needs** — what people say they want — or **real needs** — what objective study shows they actually require. A skilled social worker balances both.

*Example:* In a community meeting in a slum, residents mention many problems — open drains, no street lights, children dropping out of school, and drug use among youth. The social worker facilitates a discussion and the community collectively decides that open drains causing disease is the most urgent problem to address first.

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## Step 4 — Building Rapport and Developing Relationships

While rapport-building begins from the first day of entry, this step involves **deepening and widening relationships** with a larger number of community members — especially those who are marginalised or excluded from community decision-making, such as women, youth, elderly people, and Dalits.

The social worker identifies **natural leaders** — people whom others already look up to and trust — and builds a stronger working relationship with them. These natural leaders will later become the driving force of the community organisation.

At this stage, the worker also identifies **gatekeepers** — powerful individuals who may either support or block the process — and handles those relationships carefully and diplomatically.

*Example:* In a women's community organisation effort, the social worker makes special efforts to build relationships with women individually — visiting them at home, talking to them in small groups — because in public community meetings, they may not speak freely due to social pressure.

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## Step 5 — Creating Awareness and Conscientisation

This is one of the most powerful steps in community organisation. **Conscientisation** — a term made famous by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire — means helping people develop a critical understanding of their situation. It means helping people realise:

That their suffering is **not natural or inevitable** — it has social, economic, and political causes. That they have **rights** that are being denied. That they have the **power to change** their situation if they come together. That the system — not their fate — is responsible for many of their problems.

This awareness is created through **community meetings, street plays, folk songs, storytelling, awareness campaigns, and discussions**. It transforms people from passive victims to active agents of change.

*Example:* In a tribal community where people accepted forest displacement as unavoidable, a social worker facilitated awareness sessions about the Forest Rights Act, 2006 — helping people understand that they had a legal right to their land and that they could fight for it. This conscientisation transformed passive acceptance into organised resistance.

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## Step 6 — Organisation Building — Forming Groups and Committees

Once awareness is created and people are motivated to act, the next step is **formally organising them** into groups, committees, or associations. This gives the community a structured form through which they can work collectively.

This could be a **Resident Welfare Association, a Women's Self Help Group, a Youth Club, a Farmers' Collective, or a Community Development Committee** — depending on the nature of the community and its goals.

The organisation must be **democratic** — with elected leaders, clear roles, regular meetings, and transparent functioning. The social worker helps set up this structure but ensures that the community owns and runs it.

*Example:* After several awareness meetings in a slum community, residents form a Mohalla Committee with representatives from each lane of the locality. They elect a president, secretary, and treasurer from among themselves and begin holding weekly meetings to plan collective action.

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## Step 7 — Identification and Mobilisation of Resources

With the community now organised, the next step is to **identify and mobilise resources** — both internal and external — needed to address the identified problems.

**Internal resources** include local skills and knowledge, community labour, local leaders, women's groups, youth energy, land, and cultural capital. These must always be identified and activated first — because they build ownership and self-reliance.

**External resources** include government schemes and programmes, NGO support, funding agencies, legal aid organisations, media, and professional experts. These supplement but do not replace local resources.

The social worker plays a key role in **linking the community to external resources** — helping them navigate government offices, apply for schemes, and connect with supporting organisations.

*Example:* A community wanting to build a children's library first pools its own resources — donated books, a spare room in the community centre, volunteer teachers. Then the social worker helps them apply to a government scheme for furniture and additional books — combining internal and external resources for maximum impact.

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## Step 8 — Planning of Action

Now that the problem is clear, the community is organised, and resources are identified, the next step is **planning** — **deciding exactly what needs to be done, by whom, how, and when.**

A good action plan includes: the specific goal to be achieved, the activities to be carried out, the responsibilities of each person or group, the timeline, the resources required, and the indicators by which success will be measured.

This planning must be done **by the community themselves** — with the social worker facilitating the process, not deciding for them. A plan that the community makes together is a plan they will follow through on.

*Example:* The Mohalla Committee planning to demand better sanitation creates a step-by-step action plan — week one: document and photograph all problem areas; week two: prepare a written complaint with signatures; week three: submit complaint to the municipality; week four: follow up and if no response, organise a community march to the municipal office.

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## Step 9 — Implementation of the Action Plan

This is the step where **planning turns into action**. The community carries out the activities they have planned — organising meetings, conducting campaigns, approaching authorities, running programmes, or directly solving problems through community effort.

The social worker's role here is to **support, guide, and encourage** — not to do the work for the community. The community must be in the driver's seat. The worker helps resolve obstacles, maintains motivation, and ensures that the democratic process is followed throughout.

This step tests the community's unity, leadership, and commitment. There will be challenges — some people may lose interest, authorities may not respond, or resources may fall short. The social worker helps the community navigate these difficulties without losing momentum.

*Example:* The community carries out a massive cleanliness drive, organises a signature campaign, submits a memorandum to the municipal authority, and follows up with a peaceful demonstration outside the municipal office — all as planned, led entirely by community members themselves.

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## Step 10 — Evaluation

Once the action has been taken and some time has passed, it is important to **evaluate** — to honestly assess what worked, what did not work, what was achieved, and what still needs to be done.

Evaluation is not about judging failure — it is about **learning and improving**. It helps the community understand their own progress, celebrate their successes, learn from their mistakes, and plan their next steps more effectively.

Evaluation can be done through **community meetings, discussions, reviewing records, comparing the situation before and after**, and taking feedback from community members.

*Example:* Three months after submitting their sanitation complaint and organising the demonstration, the Mohalla Committee holds a review meeting. They find that two out of five drainage problems have been fixed. They evaluate what worked — the collective pressure — and what needs to continue — following up on the remaining three problems. They plan their next round of action based on this evaluation.

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## Step 11 — Follow-Up and Continuation

Community organisation does not end with one success. After evaluation, the community identifies new problems, sets new goals, and continues the process. The social worker also does **follow-up** — checking whether the changes achieved are being maintained, whether the community organisation is functioning well, and whether any new support is needed.

Gradually, as the community becomes more confident and capable, the social worker **reduces their active role** — moving from a central guide to a background supporter. The goal is that eventually the community can carry on entirely on its own.

*Example:* After successfully solving the sanitation problem, the Mohalla Committee does not dissolve. They continue meeting and now take up the issue of street lighting and then children's education. The community organisation has become a permanent and self-sustaining institution — which was the goal all along.

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## Summary of Steps

| Step                          | What Happens                                               |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Entry into Community       | Building initial trust and familiarity                     |
| 2. Community Study            | Understanding the community deeply                         |
| 3. Identification of Problems | Prioritising needs with the community                      |
| 4. Building Rapport           | Deepening relationships with all groups                    |
| 5. Creating Awareness         | Conscientisation — awakening critical thinking             |
| 6. Organisation Building      | Forming groups and committees                              |
| 7. Resource Mobilisation      | Identifying and activating internal and external resources |
| 8. Action Planning            | Making a clear, community-owned plan                       |

| Step              | What Happens                        |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 9. Implementation | Carrying out the plan collectively  |
| 10. Evaluation    | Reviewing progress and learning     |
| 11. Follow-Up     | Continuing, sustaining, and growing |

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## Conclusion

The steps in community organisation represent a journey — from a social worker entering an unknown community to that community becoming a confident, self-reliant, and organised force for change. Each step is essential. Skipping any step weakens the entire process.

What makes these steps powerful is that they are not imposed from outside — they are walked together by the social worker and the community, side by side, with trust, respect, and a shared commitment to justice and dignity.

As the great community organiser Saul Alinsky said — **"Change means movement. Movement means friction."** The steps of community organisation give that movement direction, and that friction purpose.