

## A GLOBAL FRAMEWORK: STEP-BY-STEP GUIDELINES TO APPLY THE MULTILEVEL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL TO EFFECTIVELY WORK WITH CULTURALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD

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*This paper provides a description of the Multilevel Community Engagement Model (MCEM) and a comprehensive (step-by-step) framework to use and apply MCEM to effectively work with culturally diverse communities around the world. The author also presents two case studies (United States and Pakistan) that demonstrate real-life situations to illustrate the use and application of MCEM in real-life circumstances. MCEM offers a plan/roadmap to researchers, practitioners, and development agencies globally that is multilevel, holistic, and culturally appropriate. MCEM empowers vulnerable families living in culturally diverse communities and recognizes their voices in the process program development, implementation, and evaluation. Consequently, target families and communities gain appropriate knowledge and skills in a collaborative process of transformation, which results in program sustainability and positive outcomes. MCEM may help provide a paradigm shift from bottom-up approaches to increasingly inclusive, engaged, and collaborative community approaches that may also inform new strategies and approaches of donor/funding agencies towards community engagement and development. The implications and limitations are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Multilevel Community Engagement Model, Step-by-Step Framework, Stakeholder Engagement, Program Sustainability*

### 1. Introduction

In this paper, the author presents the Multilevel Community Engagement Model (MCEM; Raza, 2020b) and the Framework that allow researchers, practitioners, and development agencies to identify, engage, and utilize relevant stakeholder groups at three different engagement levels (i.e., proximal, influential, and holistic) to develop, implement, and evaluate community programs and effectively work with culturally diverse communities around the world. MCEM is a comprehensive engagement framework, which recognizes the voices of underrepresented and underprivileged groups of the population, eliminates power hierarchies between practitioners and target families, and fosters collaboration among all relevant stakeholder groups in a process of community engagement and development to achieve positive program outcomes and sustainability (Raza, 2021).

There have been substantial efforts by researchers, practitioners, and development agencies to improve their work and adequately understand and address the needs of families living in culturally diverse communities (Raza, 2020a). The outcomes are encouraging and showed excellent progress in terms of staff communication, program approaches, and community collaboration towards community empowerment and development (Raza, 2017). However, vulnerable families living in culturally diverse communities which are already experiencing challenges due to the intersections of different areas of diversity, such as race, class, and gender still lack to receive equal/appropriate

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advantages/benefits of community programs due to lack of participation, collaboration, and engagement in these programs (Raza, 2018). Consequently, their lives do not substantially change because they are stuck in the poverty trap that also relates to other social and health issues for these families (Raza, 2020a). Researchers have been using participatory approaches to make the learning process more inclusive for all target families (Herr, 2017). Their work showed important improvements and positive changes in terms of community engagement and inclusiveness, which challenge the traditional (top-down) approaches that lack families' participation and engagement in community programs (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Such participatory approaches acknowledge local knowledge and offer a collaborative learning process that equally involves researchers/practitioners and target families/communities and eliminate power hierarchies between them (Herr, 1999). Research shows the effectiveness of such participatory approaches that empower families in a learning process and function towards achieving shared community goals that result in community development (Herr, 1993; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Despite all these achievements and progress towards community empowerment and development, community programs are still lacking inclusiveness and engagement of all relevant stakeholder groups particularly those families/individuals who are more vulnerable and situate at the lowest social hierarchy (Raza, 2020a). Stakeholders refer to individuals, groups, and/or organizations who are engaged in a collaborative process during which they identify, utilize, or strengthen each other's resources and efforts to achieve shared and relevant goals (Raza, 2021). In the current society, families are becoming more diverse, new family structures are emerging, family relationships are becoming more complex, and demands for family members are increasing (Cherlin, 2010; Umberson & Thomeer, 2020). Existing approaches to community development are mostly top-down approaches that allow researchers/practitioners to direct community programs and guide target families to achieve their predetermined goals and objectives (Paquette et al., 2015). There is a lack of communication and collaboration between researchers/practitioners and target families who use top-down approaches (Huesca, 2008). The current community approaches do not consider cultural plurality that are growing and emerging among families and the issues of diversity that these families are experiencing around the world (Pieczka, 2011). Although there have been positive changes occurring in approaches to community development, such as participatory approaches are used that acknowledge community local knowledge and allow active participation of community members in community programs (Freire, 1993; Herr & Anderson, 2015), a comprehensive and multilevel framework is needed that allows researchers/practitioners to identify, engage, and utilize relevant stakeholder groups who are situated at different engagement levels of society and recognize their voices in the process of community program development, implementation, and evaluation. Such a framework may allow all relevant stakeholder groups to engage in an inclusive process that encourages and promotes the use of a common language within and between the engagement levels and provides stakeholders with an opportunity to spend time with each other, share experiences, and engage in a critical thinking to examine community issues and suggest appropriate solutions. Hence, researchers/practitioners/development agencies need a more comprehensive, multilevel, and culturally appropriate/responsive framework to engage all relevant stakeholder groups including target and nontarget relevant families in community programs.

In order to address the aforementioned gaps, the current paper presents the Multilevel Community Engagement Model (MCEM) along with a step-by-step framework to effectively work with families living in culturally diverse communities around the world. MCEM is broad enough to be used and applied in diverse communities, cultures, and societies and simultaneously, it is narrow to a certain extent that can be empirically observed and tested. MCEM may help guide researchers/practitioners/development agencies to identify, engage, and utilize all relevant stakeholder groups for community programs and provide them with a common language and a

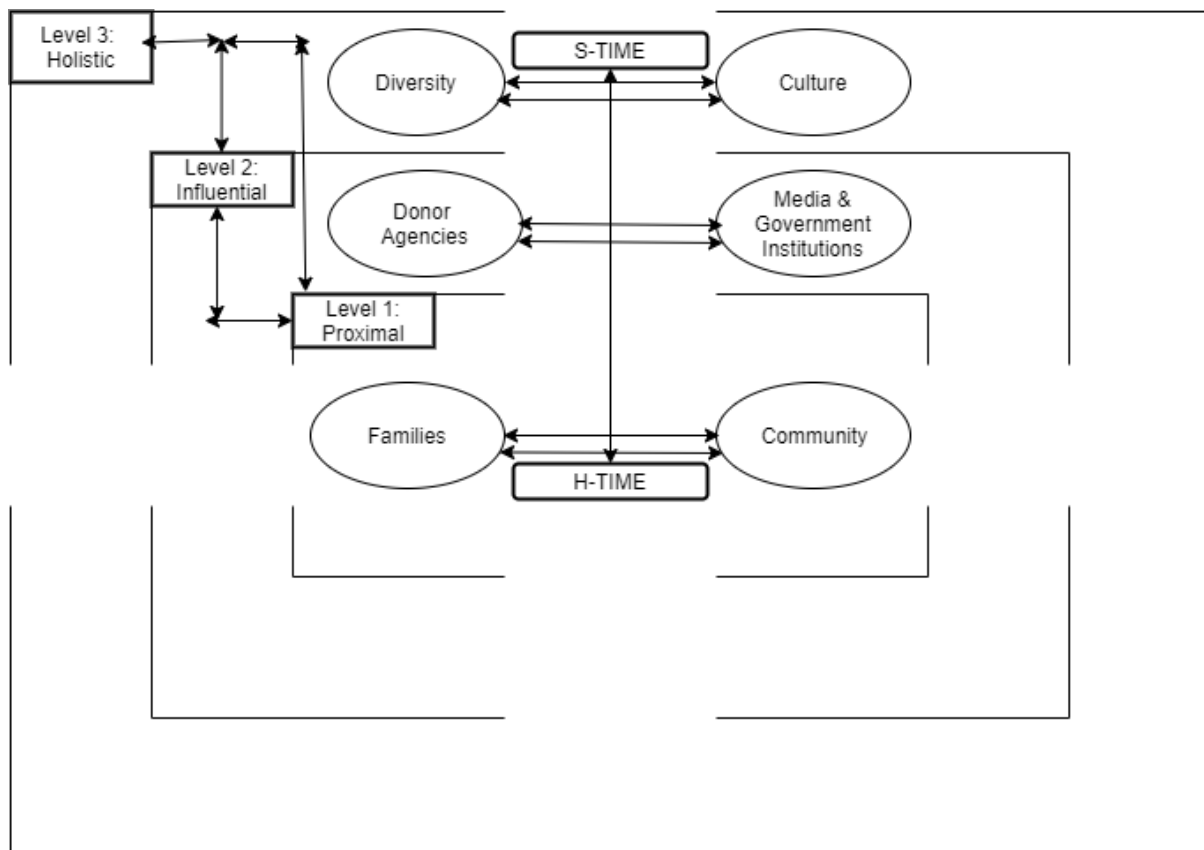
roadmap to effectively communicate with each other and successfully develop, implement, and evaluate community programs/projects that are sustainable and lead to positive outcomes.

## 2. Description of the Multilevel Community Engagement Model

Multilevel Community Engagement Model is grounded in family systems theory (Smith & Hamon, 2017), participatory action research (PAR; Herr & Anderson, 2015), and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is also informed by empirical research and direct observations of the author (Raza, 2017; 2018; 2020a). A detailed description of the methodology and the process used in the development of MCEM can be read in the study, Raza (2021).

Although the author used his studies, which he conducted based on the data collected in Pakistan along with his own experience and direct observations that informed the development of the model, the author developed MCEM with the aim of being adopted around the world. Therefore, MCEM is broad enough that it can be applied to different communities, cultures, and societies and simultaneously it is narrow to an extent that it can be empirically tested and measured, which may help MCEM and its framework to evolve and grow over time and adapt to the unique community needs in the United States, Pakistan, and globally.

Figure 1. Multilevel Community Engagement Model (MCEM)



Note: S-TIME = Sociocultural time; H-TIME = Historical Time

Figure 1 shows the Multilevel Community Engagement Model (Raza, 2020b). There are three engagement levels (i.e., proximal, influential, and holistic) of MCEM. Multiple stakeholder groups are situated at each engagement level of MCEM. For instance, target families, support groups,

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community-based organizations/agencies, nontarget relevant families, etc. are situated at the first (i.e., the proximal level) engagement level. Donor/funding agencies, media (e.g., newspapers, magazine, radio, television, internet, etc.) and public state/federal institutions are located at the second (i.e., the influential level) engagement level. The third engagement level (i.e., the holistic level) includes areas of diversity, such as race, class, gender, religion, place of residence, disability, sexual orientation, etc., and culture. According to MCEM, stakeholder groups within and between the engagement levels have reciprocal relationships with each other. The reciprocal relationships between stakeholder groups within and between the engagement levels are influenced by sociocultural and historical times. Open areas of each engagement level signify a strong collaboration, consistent coordination, and open communication between stakeholder groups within and between the engagement levels. Additional description of MCEM with specific examples and details can be found in the study conducted by Raza (2021) and other future studies.

### **3. Step-by-step framework to apply MCEM**

In this section, the author provides a step-by-step MCEM framework, explains each step with examples and scenarios, and uses two case studies to apply the framework.

#### ***3.1 Case study 1 (United States)***

A nongovernment agency that has previously worked in a rural Springfield Missouri community received funds from a donor agency to develop, implement, and evaluate a community program for 500 households/families living in this community. After a baseline assessment, the donor agency identified few important issues that families living in Springfield Missouri community were facing, such as poverty, child abuse, and intimate partner violence, that were affecting family functioning. The donor agency initially decided to partner with a local nongovernment agency to work on these issues and provided funds to the local agency to develop, implement, and assess a program on improving family relationships and functioning. This agency works with families and children and promotes healthy family relationships. There is another nongovernment organization that works in the same community and focuses on addressing issues regarding intimate partner violence and child abuse. There are also a number of support groups for parents/families who are also working in that community to help and support these families. The community has an elementary school, church, and a community center. There are local radio and television channels that cover the community and provide families with important information related to local schools, health services, and public policies/announcements.

Families have access to television, radio, and the internet. Family members use social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, to interact with people and form relationships. The donor agency also established an office in the community. There are local public/government departments that provide services regarding health and education. In addition, there is a child advocacy center that provides services to families living in the Springfield community. Families living in that community are quite diverse in terms of race, class and family structures. There are many families in the community who live below the poverty line. Family members also do low-paid jobs mostly in the services sector and there is a high unemployment rate in this community compared to the other communities. Family members also work nonstandard work schedules. There are racially and ethnically diverse groups living in that community, such as African American, Asian, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Whites. Families practice different cultures and celebrate their family traditions and rituals. Interracial relationships exist among families in that community. There are a few immigrant

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families in that community as well. Prevalence of poverty and crime rate are quite high in that community compared to other Springfield communities of similar sizes and issues of justice and equity are also currently in debate.

Although there were sufficient data already available about families living in that community, such as family size, income, employment status etc., Stakeholders also decided to collect the current data on the demographics of families and different social issues, such as poverty, intimate partner violence, child development, and parent-child relationships to learn and explore important issues that families were facing at that time. After examining the data and stakeholder consultation, the stakeholder group decided to develop, implement, and assess a community program specifically on parent-child relationships focusing on children ages 0-8. The focus of this community program was to improve parent-child relationships to strengthen these families and improve their family functioning. Consequently, this program addressed specific needs/priorities (strengthen parent-child relationships) of community stakeholders and met the funding requirement (i.e., improving family relationships) provided by the donor agency.

### **3.2 Case study 2 (Pakistan)**

A government district population welfare department received funds from a donor agency to implement a program in a Union Council of District Khanewal. In Pakistan, a Union Council refers to an elected local government body, which consists of 21 councilors, and headed by a nazim (who is also known as a Chairman) and a naib nazim (who is also known as Vice Chairman). A Union Council is the fifth tier of government in Pakistan, which is comprised of a large village and surrounded by small villages. This Union Council is a part of rural areas of the District Khanewal. The Union Council has five villages which have different population sizes in terms of the number of households in a village. The total number of households in all five villages are 650. The donor agency is interested in a program that promotes health and family well-being among rural families. There is a Union Council office that is run by Nazim, Naib Nazim, Union Council secretary, and other members of the union council. This union council is quite underprivileged where people are less educated and mostly depend on agricultural land, which is vulnerable to natural disasters, such as floods, heavy rains, and storms. There is an elementary school and a Mosque in every village. A few nongovernment organizations have been working there on social and economic issues, such as gender equality, health, microenterprise, and poverty. Few financially strong families have mobile phones, television, and radio. The use of internet is quite low in these villages. Consequently, people do not often use social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. The Union Council office has some secondary data about the families/households living in each village. Nongovernment organizations also conducted some surveys on different social issues and developed reports, which can be requested for use from their offices. The implementing agency (district population welfare department) also has some existing data that provide a better view of socioeconomic conditions of the households/families, but this data is five years old. There is a strong Caste system in this Union Council. Families practice traditional gender roles and strictly follow religion that reflects in their day-to-day lives and interactions. These families practice collectivistic culture and live in extended family systems.

The implementing agency (district population welfare department) coordinated with a few group of stakeholders (e.g., nongovernment agencies, union council office, elementary school, mosque, etc.) who have the data available or important information to share about community issues that can be a useful starting point of baseline for the implementing agency. After meeting with each stakeholder group/individual, the implementing agency conducted a meeting in their district office in which they invited all relevant stakeholder groups and requested them to share their data,

experiences, and any important relevant information about the Union Council in general and particularly for each village. After reviewing the data, stakeholder groups including the implementing agency decided to initially focus on a village which was at a high risk and remained underprivileged compared to the other villages due to political conflict. Stakeholder groups decided to collect primary and more specific data on health and family well-being, gender equality, microenterprise, poverty, and other issues that were guided by the existing data and with the consultation of all relevant stakeholders. After collecting data from the target village which had 100 households/families, stakeholders found that the village is seriously facing the issue of contraception use, which is causing high fertility levels of each family, affecting the health of mothers, and the overall well-being of the family.

After examining the data and stakeholder consultation, stakeholder groups decided to develop, implement, and evaluate a community program specifically on promoting contraception use among these 100 households/families living in the target village. The focus of this community program was to improve couple communication, gender equality, and the use and accessibility of contraception for target families. Consequently, this program addressed specific needs/priorities (i.e., improving contraception use) of community stakeholders and met the funding requirement (i.e., promoting health and family well-being among rural families) provided by the donor agency.

### 3.3. Step-by-step framework

1. Identify your stakeholder groups at the first engagement level of MCEM.

<u>Case Study 1</u>	<u>Case Study 2</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A nongovernment agency</li> <li>b. 500 families</li> <li>c. Another nongovernment organization that works on intimate partner violence and child abuse</li> <li>d. Support groups for parents/families</li> <li>e. An elementary school</li> <li>f. A Church</li> <li>g. A community center</li> <li>h. A child advocacy center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. District population welfare department</li> <li>b. 650 households living in a union council</li> <li>c. A union council office that is run by Nazim, Naib Nazim, Union Council secretary, and other members of the union council</li> <li>d. An elementary school</li> <li>e. A Mosque</li> <li>f. Few nongovernment organizations</li> <li>g. The target village which had 100 households/families</li> </ul>

2. Identify your stakeholder groups at the second engagement level of MCEM.

<u>Case Study 1</u>	<u>Case Study 2</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A donor agency</li> <li>b. Radio and TV channels</li> <li>c. The internet</li> <li>d. Facebook and Twitter (social media)</li> <li>e. Local public/government departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A donor agency</li> <li>b. Mobile phones, television, and radio</li> <li>c. The internet</li> <li>d. Facebook and Twitter</li> </ul>

3. Identify your stakeholder groups at the third engagement level of MCEM.

<u>Case Study 1</u>	<u>Case Study 2</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Race, class, and family structures (areas of diversity)</li> <li>b. Different cultures</li> <li>c. Immigrant families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Gender</li> <li>b. Poverty/class</li> <li>c. Caste</li> <li>d. Religion</li> <li>e. Education</li> <li>f. Rural families and agricultural land (place of residence)</li> <li>g. Collectivistic culture</li> </ul>

4. After identifying these stakeholders at three different engagement levels, think about how they are reciprocally related with each other within and between the engagement levels.

a. **In case study 1**, if you think about the reciprocal relationship between families living in this community presented in the case study 1 and support groups for parents/families, support groups are a greater source of support for families who are victims of abuse and violence, whereas families also become a part of these support groups and provide them with volunteer services. These support groups have their vision and mission that shape their services and assistance they provide to families. On the other hand, family members bring their values, beliefs, and ideas that may influence the functioning of these support groups. Hence, there is a reciprocal relationship between families and support groups which are situated at the first (i.e., the proximal level) engagement level of MCEM.

b. Now think about the reciprocal relationship between these two groups of stakeholders (families and support groups) at the first engagement level (the proximal level) and social media (Facebook and Twitter) at the second engagement level (the influential level). Facebook and Twitter provide families and support groups with important information and opportunities to connect with others who need assistance or have the same experiences whereas, families and support groups also share their experiences and offer assistance that provide useful information to other users/consumers who may also be in need of it and make social media a rich platform/source of information and making connections. Therefore, stakeholder groups (families and support groups) located at the proximal level and stakeholder groups (social media) at the influential level can reciprocally affect each other.

c. Similarly, social media (Facebook and Twitter) provides individuals/families of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (race and ethnicity are the areas of diversity) with a platform to share their experiences and cultures with others and make these informational resources accessible for others that help them perform well in their daily lives. These social media platforms also influence the thinking, cultural beliefs, and ideologies of people on different aspects of family life and society when people gain and share new knowledge and information with each other. On the other hand, family diversity and plurality of culture that is prevalent around the world also affect the performance and functioning of social media platforms and inform their policies and procedures to facilitate diverse individuals, groups, and families globally. Hence, social media located at the second engagement level (the influential level) and culture and diversity located at the third engagement level (holistic level) reciprocally influence each other.

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d. Likewise, examine and note how other stakeholder groups within and between engagement levels can reciprocally influence each other.

e. **In case study 2**, there is a reciprocal relationship between the district population welfare department and the families living in the union council. For instance, the population welfare department provides these families with health services, such as reproductive health, contraception use, etc. Families bring their own demands and challenging for the implementing agency (the district population welfare department). For example, some families are extremely religious and traditional gender roles are prevalent in these families. Thus, the staff need to work differently with these families and carry out additional efforts to convince them for birth spacing, promote the use of contraception, and educate them about children and maternal mortality issues. Hence, the population welfare department and these families reciprocally influence each other.

f. Those families who have access to advanced technology, such as television and internet are more aware about reproductive issues and consequently, they have more access to reproductive services, such as use of and access to contraception compared to those who do not have access to this technology. Those families who can use this technology show a demand and attraction for mobile and internet companies to come in their villages/communities and start their business compared to other families/communities. Therefore, media and families reciprocally influence each other.

g. Similarly, poor families are more likely to depend on agricultural land, which is vulnerable to natural disasters, such as floods, storms, and heavy rain. Poor families usually do not own their land and they are employed on rich people's agricultural land. They receive income or wheat for their services and hardly earn their living to fulfill their basic family needs. Some families have dairy animals that are also vulnerable to disease or natural disasters. In case of a natural disaster, families do not have an appropriate transportation to move their animals and the transportation cost substantially increases during the time of emergency that makes it harder for them to afford it and transfer their animals in safer places. Thus, the areas of diversity, such as class and place or residence, which are located at the third engagement level have a reciprocal relationship with each other and they also reciprocally influence the families which are located at the first engagement level.

5. Reach out to and meet with each individual stakeholder group located at each of the engagement levels before conducting a joint meeting. At the conclusion of the meeting ask for referrals to other potential stakeholders (snowball effect of stakeholder identification).

a. Sometimes important stakeholder groups are hidden, or they do not want to participate due to many factors, such as lack of interest, time, and motivation. It is also likely that these groups are neglected in the past who have low social status in society. Hence, it is important for practitioners to engage and utilize all stakeholder groups as much as possible that may help to make the process more inclusive and representative of the entire community. This may also increase agreement and decrease conflicts among different stakeholder groups, create a culture of cooperation, collaboration, and engagement, and also recognize the voices of underrepresented and underprivileged groups of the population.

b. **In case study 1**, members of support groups for parents/families an play an important role in facilitating the smooth implementation of the community program if they are fully identified and effectively approached to ensure their participation in the program.

c. **In case study 2**, since the district population welfare department (the implementing agency) received the funds from the donor agency and they are likely to work with many



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- families, union council office, and nongovernment organizations located in the villages. It is important for them to initially identify and meet with individual stakeholder groups. The logistic and technical support from the donor agency can be an important resource for the implementing agency to reach out and meet with stakeholder groups individually.
6. Share and learn historical and sociocultural context/information about families and the community through a collaborative learning process during these meetings.
    - a. In case study 1, the issues of justice and equity (historical context) are presented.
    - b. In case study 2, the historical issues, such as ongoing political conflict and intergenerational family systems are presented.
    - c. Since MCEM suggests an inclusive process in the development, implementation, and evaluation of community programs, it is important for stakeholder groups to be reflective of their history in terms of the issues of justice and equity and share their privileges and vulnerabilities, which may help them to understand community issues in contextualized manners.
    - d. Since these meetings are conducted in the beginning or the initial stages of community programs and the implanting agency is the primary entity who starts this process after formally receiving funds from a donor agency, it is their responsibility to record all this information when they meet with each stakeholder group and when stakeholders discuss and share information and experiences on sociocultural and historical contexts of families and communities. The staff of implementing agency can either audio record these meetings or take notes if audio recordings are not possible or suitable. It is important for the implanting agency to electronically record this information on a computer or any electronic device. A brief report accompanied with reflections and upcoming events/meetings would be beneficial to develop and share with all participants and other relevant stakeholder groups to make sure all stakeholders are well-informed, heard, and updated about the program process. Stakeholders' feedback should be welcomed and incorporated at all stages of the community program to show respect for them and make the program process more representative, reflective, inclusive, and trustworthy for all relevant stakeholder groups.
  7. Bring relevant/identified stakeholder groups together, conduct a meeting and brainstorm with them different issues that families in the community are facing. Be prepared to conduct multiple meetings in order to identify needs and discuss the core conditions contributing to the issues identified.
    - a. In case study 1, poverty and crime rate (sociocultural context) are presented.
    - b. In case study 2, sociocultural issues, such as health issues, high fertility, and lack of contraction use are presented. It is important to note that stakeholder groups particularly the families can be substantially different from each other in terms of class, education, caste, and religious practices. According to MCEM, each stakeholder group is equally important and MCEM encourages the participation of all relevant stakeholders regardless of their social locations, such as race, class, and gender in the program process. Hence, the district population department/implementing agency should be ready to facilitate each stakeholder group according to their education and background and acknowledge their expertise and utilize them as an important resource throughout the community program.
    - c. After reflecting on the past, it is time to discuss and examine the current issues that the community is facing. Since stakeholder groups already talked about and reflect on their past that influences the present, it may help to create linkages between the current
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sociocultural context and historical context and contextualize the discussion that may help to better understand community unique needs and issues.

8. You can use the existing data/information and also collect your primary data. If sufficient resources (e.g., time, money) are not available, you can use preexisting data, especially when representatives from many relevant stakeholder groups are participating in the collaboration.
  - a. In case study 1, sufficient data already available about families living in that community, such as family size, income, and employment status presented in the case study
  - b. Stakeholders also decided to collect the current data on the demographics of families and different social issues, such as poverty, intimate partner violence, child development, and parent-child relationships.
  - c. In case study 2, multiple sources of data were available and used by stakeholders based on which stakeholder groups including the implementing agency decided to initially focus on a village which was at a high risk and remained underprivileged compared to the other villages due to political conflict. Hence, secondary data is an important source for stakeholders that can be initially used to guide further actions and plans. Stakeholder groups decided to collect primary and more specific data on health and family well-being, gender equality, microenterprise, poverty, and other issues that were guided by the existing data and with the consultation of all relevant stakeholders. It is worth mentioning that if resources, such as money and time are currently not available, stakeholders can use secondary data to identify community issues because the engagement process is more inclusive that provides opportunities to stakeholder group to actively participate and share their experiences and expertise who are well aware of community issues. The assessment process should be reflective, transparent, trustworthy, relevant, and meaningful for all stakeholders during which the facilitator or technical expert utilizes local knowledge and expertise and collaboratively work with all stakeholder groups.
  - d. The sources and nature of data may depend on many factors, such as time, resources, and stakeholders' expertise. The data do not have to be extremely technical if stakeholder groups do not have appropriate expertise, the relevance is more important and probably a good balance between rigor (scientific evidence) and relevance (stakeholder experiences) may provide more informed decisions and understanding of community issues. Since this process is more engaging and inclusive, stakeholder groups who already have sufficient community knowledge and understanding of community issues are present to share information, hence, the information/data collected through this process may likely be more representative of the community and accurately present community current issues.
9. Identify the issue/topic stakeholders would like to focus on in the community program.
  - a. In case study 1, stakeholder group decided to develop, implement, and assess a community program focusing on parent-child relationships in families with children aged 0-8 years, as presented in the case study.
  - b. In case study 2, after collecting data from the target village which had 100 households/families, stakeholders found that the village is seriously facing the issue of contraception use, which is causing high fertility levels of each family, affecting the health of mothers, and the overall well-being of the family.
  - c. It is important for practitioners/agencies to find a balance between scientific evidence (data collected through need assessments) and community relevance and felt needs. When primary data is collected for a need assessment, participatory approaches should

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be used, and all relevant stakeholder groups should be actively engaged throughout this process of need assessment. When community members are actively engaged in data collection, they would have a better understanding of data/information and its relevance to community issues.

d. It is also essential for practitioners/agencies to facilitate stakeholder groups in their understanding of the need assessment process, which may help to transform the knowledge/skills that can be used by community stakeholder groups after the formal completion of the program to continue sustainable efforts for eliminating/addressing the issue or they can utilize this knowledge/expertise in other community programs/initiatives. Consequently, data collected may likely be more meaningful for all stakeholders and representative of the target community including target families and accurately present community issues. When stakeholders have a better understanding of and relevance to data they collected, it may also increase their engagement and participation in the community program.

e. Identifying an issue for the community program is a collaborative and engaging process among all stakeholder groups including target families/communities who decide which issue they want to focus on where they feel the immediate need of the program if the program cannot be implemented all over the community. Usually, practitioners/agencies simultaneously work with many communities or there may be many villages/towns/scattered areas within a community, hence, the program may not be implemented in all areas of the community at the same time. Thus, practitioners/agencies can facilitate a process through which stakeholders can map these issues on different areas of the community and decide which issue is more severe and which areas have an immediate need for the program.

f. It is important to note that rural communities usually lack technical knowledge and skills, so, less technical modes and methods of delivery can help to engage the community and facilitate their learning throughout the community program, which is extremely important because community people are the ones who may likely implement and sustain program efforts even after the formal completion of the program or the removal of funding. For instance, research showed when researchers/practitioners adapted to community situations and stakeholders' learning styles/needs/abilities, removed the use of computer applications and changed pedagogical approaches (e.g., moved from giving PowerPoint presentations to the use of whiteboard, charts, and board markers), participants' level of motivation, learning experiences, and outcomes were substantially increased (Raza, 2020).

g. Instead of designing/developing sophisticated maps in computer applications/software, such as ArcGIS software to illustrate community issues and affected areas, practitioners/researchers can conduct an activity called "Participatory Rural Appraisal" during which practitioners/researchers divide community people into small groups who develop community maps on charts, map the community population and issues on different areas based on the data/evidence, share/discuss their experiences and stories related to the community issues, highlight the severity of issue in particular areas and discuss the immediate needs based on the resources, time, and money available for the community program (Raza, 2020).

h. The target community may be facing several issues, but the priority should be given to the issue (s) based on community felt needs, which is also supported by the evidence/data and that is the primary cause of other community issues. It is important to note, once

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stakeholders are prepared and equipped with appropriate knowledge/skills to deal with community issues, they can handle and focus on other issues as well.

10. Identify the resources and strengths of each stakeholder relevant to the community program that they can offer and utilize for the community program.
  - a. Stakeholders' resources can be tangible as well as intangible. Some groups/individuals who lack education or skills may have expertise on building community networks/relationships because they may have social skills to make connections and relationships with community people including target families. For instance, particularly in developing countries, such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Iran, and Afghanistan, if individuals/families run a small business (e.g., grocery store or tea stall), they know almost the entire neighborhood and make good connections with community people in that area. Community people visit their place regularly and either the owner or their employees entertain customers to attract them at least by discussing different family and community issues. Hence, it is important to recognize and utilize the strengths of each stakeholder group/individual in the process of community program development, implementation, and evaluation.
  - b. **In case study 1**, individuals from church, support groups, and the community center may have less educational levels and technical skills, but they know the community people and their issues very well.
  - c. **In case study 2**, Nazim and Naib Nazim are elected from those individuals/families who are living in these villages including the target village. These individuals are quite popular and engaged with these families who can play an important role in the smooth implementation of community programs.
11. Think, share, and write the community vision and mission.
  - a. To increase collaboration and engagement, it is important for stakeholder groups to have a shared, realistic, and meaningful vision and mission of their community, which may provide them with a roadmap and a purpose for their collaboration and engagement in community programs over time.
  - b. **In case study 1**, an example of the community vision: Making families strong and resilient to improve family functioning.
  - c. **In case study 2**, an example of the community vision: Promoting health and well-being of community families.
  - d. **In case study 1**, an example of the community mission: To build positive relationships among all family members and eliminate all kinds of abuse and neglect.
  - e. **In case study 2**, an example of the community mission: To improve family health and well-being by decreasing family size, improving quality of life, and empowering women and children.
12. Write a few SMART (S-specific, M-measurable, A-attainable, R-relevant, T-time bound) goals and objectives for your community program.
  - a. It is important for all stakeholder groups to participate in developing program goals and objectives. These program goals and objectives should be relevant and meaningful for all stakeholder groups and also aligned with their community vision and mission.
  - b. **In case study 1**, an example of the community program objective: The objective of this community program is to strengthen parent-child relationships among all types of families living in the community who have children aged 0-8 years.
  - c. **In case study 2**, an example of the community program objective: The objective of this community program is to improve the accessibility and use of contraception among women in the target village.

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13. Based on the identified SMART goals and objectives, develop a program with all interested and relevant stakeholder groups. What activities do you want to include in your community program? Which methods/modes of delivery and pedagogical approaches will you use?
- It is important for stakeholder groups to balance technical knowledge/skills and families' real-life experiences and values. For this purpose, stakeholder groups should make sure that their community/program vision, mission, goals, objectives, and activities are consistent and aligned with the community values. This approach may help to engage and motivate all relevant stakeholder groups including target families in the program, improve program fidelity, show positive outcomes, and ensure program sustainability.
  - The aforementioned examples of community/program vision, mission, and objective show a consistency across community vision, mission, and program objective, whereas the overall community aim is to build positive family relationships, eliminate all kinds of violence, abuse, and neglect, and foster healthy family functioning among families living in target communities.
  - It is worth mentioning that stakeholders can either have separate community vision and mission statements for their target communities and they can also develop separate vision and mission statements for the program, or they can only develop community vision and mission statements that will guide all community programs. In that case, the community vision and mission statements would be much broader and vaguer than the program vision and mission statements.
  - It is important to determine the duration of community program and the number of activities based on the severity, intensity, and seriousness of the issue, a high dose, age appropriate, and culturally responsive program may help to substantially decrease or eliminate the issue from the community. It is also essential to note that stakeholder groups will continue their efforts towards this issue until it is eliminated or reduced to a minimum level that is harmless even after the formal completion of this program due to the funding or changes in priorities. In the meanwhile, stakeholder groups can also work on developing other programs that focus on other community issues.
  - In case study 1**, the program activities may include direct observations of parent-child interactions, sessions with parents and children, sessions with the entire family, sessions with the members from the family and school.
  - In case study 2**, the program activities may include awareness sessions on the use of contraception with men and women, separate meetings with each couple to improve their communication about the family size and contraception use, encourage men to provide women more opportunities to make household/family decisions, sessions with elders and influential family members, such as mother-in-law and father-in-law, meeting with teachers and religious scholars of the village to ensure their support in promoting contraception use and gender equality.
14. Develop implementation strategies, these should be grounded in stakeholder collaboration and engagement.
- In case study 1**, since current families are more diverse, family structures are changing, demands from family and work are increasing, it is important to use comprehensive, multilevel, and culturally appropriate/responsive strategies/approaches for the implementation of community programs. When families find program activities relevant to their cultural practices and meaningful for their daily life, it may increase their motivation, participation, retention, and engagement in the community program.
  - In case study 2**, in rural villages of Pakistan, caste and class are very strong factors. Poor families rarely interact with external influential individuals/organizations/groups and
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lack participation in any decision making. Rich people who own large agricultural land are quite strong and influential socially and politically who make decisions for families living in rural communities. Therefore, it is important for the district population welfare department (which is used as an example) who is the primary implementing agency in the case study 2 to ensure active participation and engagement of all families regardless of their socioeconomic, social, and/or political status in the program process.

15. Develop evaluation tools based on SMART goals and objectives. Make sure to engage and include stakeholders in the evaluation process.
  - a. It is important for stakeholder groups to assess the effectiveness of the community program and document lessons learned, which may be useful for future programs. Stakeholder groups may need to find a good balance between rigor and relevance to make the assessment process and tools more useful and meaningful for the target community. The evaluation process should be equally inclusive and address any concerns to reach a consensus and an agreement.
  - b. **In case study 1**, pretest and posttest assessments can be used to examine the improvement in parent-child relationships.
  - c. **In case study 2**, biweekly data on contraception purchase, use, and accessibility can be collected and compared with the baseline data to show the program improvement. Quarterly interviews with the couples and families can also be conducted to learn about the changes and improvements they experienced due to participating in the program.
  - d. Stakeholder groups, such as teachers, staff of nongovernment organizations, staff of union council office, and staff of the district population welfare department have appropriate knowledge to understand assessment process. There are always some educated individuals living in rural areas who can also participate in the evaluation process. It is the responsibility of the implementing agency or the evaluator to also explain the assessment in a simpler language so that less educated individuals/families can also learn about community issues and program progress that may increase the motivation and participation in the community program.
16. Evaluate the program on a regular basis (e.g., weekly, monthly, process/formative evaluation etc.) and regularly share those results with stakeholder groups.
  - a. **In case study 1**, nontraditional ways that are less expensive and time consuming but useful and relevant to the community and its needs should be found, developed, and used regularly to assess the effectiveness of community programs and whether the program is implemented according to what was designed and expected. It is important to inform all stakeholder groups about the progress of the community program on regular basis.
  - b. **In case study 2**, it is important for the district population welfare department (the implementing agency of case study 2) to establish a local office in the target village if the village is in a remote area that is far away from the district office so that they can regularly implement and assess their community program. The agency's office can either consists of a room or a rented house based on the availability of funds.
17. After receiving feedback from all stakeholder groups, make appropriate changes in the program or implementation strategies. Conduct a debriefing with all stakeholder groups and reflect on the changes that were suggested and made.
  - a. **In case study 1**, in addition to reporting and informing all stakeholder groups about the progress of the community program, it is also important to make changes in the program and utilize new approaches/strategies to make it more effective and according to the plan with an agreement and consensus among all stakeholder groups. Stakeholder

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groups should be flexible and prepare to make immediate and appropriate program changes to ensure its fidelity.

b. **In case study 2**, after receiving feedback from all stakeholder groups, make appropriate changes in the program or implementation strategies. Conduct a debriefing with all stakeholder groups and reflect on the changes that were suggested and made. A biweekly or monthly newsletter may be an important source for dissemination of information and share the progress of community program on a regular basis. The implementing agency can also conduct a quarterly meeting in which the staff from the donor agency can also participate along with all relevant stakeholder groups to discuss program progress, their experiences, lessons learned, and strategies/planning for future that may help to make the community program more effective.

18. Do a summative/outcome evaluation. Make sure all stakeholder groups are involved throughout the evaluation process and program/project cycle.

a. **In case study 1**, a summative evaluation may serve different purposes. For instance, first, it may be required for the funding agency. Second, stakeholder groups may be interested to see the outcome after the program period is completed. Third, the focus or priority may be changed so the current program may continue but with less focus and resources.

b. **In case study 2**, it is usually the requirement of the donor agency to conduct a summative/outcome evaluation. Therefore, it is important for the implanting agency (the district population welfare department) to engage all relevant stakeholders and make sure to disseminate the results as much as possible among all potential audiences. Copies can be placed in the union council office, nongovernment organization offices, mosques, elementary schools, tea stalls, and any other relevant places where people can read, access and learn about the results of their community project.

19. Write a final project report and disseminate it as widely as possible among stakeholder groups, including those who were involved and who were not involved but have a vested interest in outcomes (practitioners, students, researchers, and potential future donor agencies).

a. **In case study 1**, most of the time, it is a common practice in community programs that is funded by a donor agency that the final report can become the property of the donor agency that may not be shared widely due to many factors. It is important for stakeholder groups to recognize the importance of dissemination of their community program findings for research and practice purposes and receive permission from the donor agency to distribute them widely.

b. **In case study 2**, the final project report can also be useful for local community-based organizations and groups who can write additional proposals and/or request further grants/funds to continue their community program or start a new program from any other donor agencies.

c. It is also less likely that donor agencies may be interested in publishing scholarly work on the findings of a community program, hence, it is equally important for the donor agency to disseminate and share this information and invite researchers and practitioners who can do an in-depth investigation and replicate the community program that may contribute to the existing efforts made towards community development and sustainability.

20. Based on the results, you can either update the original program cycle again and target new families or implement a new program that meets stakeholder needs/priorities.

a. **In case study 1**, there may be many factors under consideration when stakeholder groups decide whether to continue with the existing community program or develop a

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new program. For instance: What is the extent of change/progress the current program already made to the underlying issue? What else is remaining? What are the cost and benefits of the current issue and new emerging problem(s)? Whether the current issue is triggering the new one or it is an entirely different problem? Think about these and other relevant questions and make an appropriate decision with an agreement and a consensus of all stakeholder groups.

b. **In case study 2**, whether the district population welfare department continue to work on the same community issue after the formal completion of the funds or focus on a new issue, it may not be difficult for them to sustain the programming efforts because they already have their staff placed at the village level and after collaborating with other stakeholder groups, such as the union council office, elementary schools, and mosques, they can still facilitate the families to continue their community program or start a new program to ensure community program sustainability.

21. Stakeholder families who are already engaged in the program become specialized experts and can join future prevention/intervention programs.

a. **In case study 1**, If the same program is implemented with a different group of the same community or in a different community, then some of the target families can participate/volunteer in that program and become a stakeholder group of that program to share their expertise, experience, and lesson learned that may make the community program more effective.

b. **In case study 2**, the district population welfare department can utilize 5-10 families from the target village who become a stakeholder group and help to develop, implement, and evaluate community programs in other villages. These expert families can play an extremely important role because they may be quite similar to families living in the other target villages and share the same language, caste, socioeconomic status, and culture who can smoothly communicate with target families in new villages and actively participate in the community program.

22. When researchers/practitioners/agencies leave the geographical area, stakeholder groups should sustain programming efforts until the program comes to an end based on community fulfillment rather than removal of economic resources.

a. **In case study 1**, there can be many scenarios for the end/completion of a community program. First, the program duration is completed and consequently, the funding is also finished/stopped. Second, the community would like to focus on another issue that is also equally important. Third, the community wants to start another program while the current program is still in progress. It is important to note that stakeholder groups will continue the existing program even after the removal of funding or the formal completion of the community program until the elevation of the problem that the program addresses. This is a fundamental idea behind MCEM that the community will become capable of continuing the program when they become experts based on their learning through a collaborative and engaged program learning process.

b. **In case study 2**, now families of the new target village(s) would also become experts after the formal completion of the program who can collaborate with families in the other village(s) that was initially targeted and continue their programming efforts with the facilitation of the implanting agency (the district population welfare department). It is worth mentioning that the implementing agency may not need to facilitate the families living in different villages for an extended period of time. Once stakeholder groups living in the villages feel that they can work independently, the implanting agency can leave the community but it is important to provide some facilitation to the community stakeholders



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until they feel confident and ready to stand on their feet without any external assistance, such as the facilitation of the implementing agency.

23. It is worth mentioning that in order to ensure the sustainability of a community program after the formal completion of the program or the removal of funding, stakeholder groups should be prepared from the beginning and throughout the community program process to continue their efforts and plan how they will carry out their program after it is formally completed by the donor agency. The element of sustainability should be regularly discussed and planned throughout the engagement process. Since MCEM invites all relevant stakeholder groups and provides them with an opportunity to actively engage throughout the program process, such a process ensures a shared/collaborative learning and a transformation of knowledge and skills. However, it should not be assumed that stakeholder groups who are engaged in the program process will continue sustainable efforts to address the issue. Hence, the discussion on program sustainability and an appropriate planning should be a part of the engagement process.

a. **In the case study 1**, 500 families will actively engage throughout the community program cycle and become a stakeholder group. The agency/practitioner will make sure that they facilitate the learning/understanding of these families on each aspect of the community program including the assessments to prepare them to be able to independently continue the community program after the formal completion of the program or the removal of funding. Although this may take extensive time, resources, and efforts, this process may help to ensure the sustainability of community program in eliminating the issue that the program is addressing.

b. If it is not realistically possible to train/prepare all relevant stakeholder groups including target families simultaneously and provide them with technical/advanced knowledge and skills, then the agencies/practitioners may choose a few members from each stakeholder group who are volunteer and have an appropriate level of knowledge and skills needed for this purpose. It is important to note that the agencies/practitioners should be able to transform the technical knowledge/skills in a way that resonates with stakeholders' level of knowledge/abilities/learning styles. For instance, practitioners/agencies can choose 25 families out of 500 families (5% of the stakeholder group members) who meet with the experts on regular basis in addition to participating in regular program activities with other 475 families. Hence, the involvement and engagement of these 25 families require commitment and dedication for the betterment of their people and the entire community. It is important for practitioners/agencies to be explicit, specific, and clear in their expectations towards families and other stakeholders who volunteer for this purpose and agree to participate in this process and ask them to be prepared for the challenges they may potentially face for a positive and sustainable change in their community. The practitioners/agencies should have a plan for recruitment and retention in case some families or other stakeholders may decide to leave this training/mentoring process for certain reasons.

c. These 25 families and other stakeholders become the experts who may transform the knowledge/skills they receive to other families and stakeholder groups during and after the formal completion of the program. Selected and trained members of each stakeholder group will collaborate with other members in their stakeholder group, such as government department, other nongovernment organizations, support groups, funding agencies for the transformation of knowledge/skills and to invite them in their group of experts.

d. This group of stakeholder experts will continue their efforts towards addressing the issue until the issue will be eliminated or reduced to a minimal level where there is no

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further risk for the community families after the formal completion of the program or the removal of funding. This expert stakeholder group can decide whether to focus on a different issue or continue with the same issue. They can always keep an eye on the current issue in addition to focusing on another community issue.

e. Since this expert stakeholder group will continue coordinating, collaborating, and inviting new stakeholders and families into their group, new families can replace the existing families in this group and perform their duties towards community program sustainability.

f. Consequently, this process of change will continue for an extended period of time during which community families and other stakeholder groups will create new knowledge, develop a shared understanding on community issues, pursue a shared community vision, transform knowledge/skills from each other, continue their efforts towards sustainability, and bring positive changes in the lives of families and the entire community.

g. **In case study 2**, volunteers from 100 families living in the target village and members from other stakeholder groups, such as elementary school, mosque, nongovernment organizations, union council office etc. will be simultaneously prepared and trained during the program cycle to carry out the programming efforts after the formal completion of the community program or the removal of funding. It is worth mentioning that the emphasis should not be only given to individuals with a high educational level or technical skills/expertise of the members who are selected to be prepared and trained to continue sustainable efforts. A more comprehensive and inclusive approach/plan should be developed through which a diverse group of stakeholders should be formed for this purpose.

24. The advantage/privilege of using MCEM is that sometimes the community does not receive any funds or receive partial funds because their proposed program does not get fully accepted by a donor agency. In that case, community stakeholders can independently start their community program. They can follow the MCEM framework and identify, invite, and utilize relevant stakeholder groups for the community program. When stakeholder groups from different engagement levels who have different social and economic status will agree to participate in the community program, they can carry out campaigns to collect donations for the program and also financially contribute for the program. Thus, MCEM does not restrict communities to secure funds from donor agencies for their community programs.

a. **In case study 1**, additional funds can be collected from support groups, church, community center, other nongovernment organizations, etc. who were a part of stakeholder groups to continue the community program or to start a program when the community does not receive any formal funding from a donor agency.

a. **In case study 2**, funds can be collected from the village's landlords, Nazim, Naib Nazim, and businessmen. Additional funds can be generated by collecting agricultural products, such as wheat, rice, cotton, clothing from village families and sell these products efficiently in appropriate markets with better prices.

25. Another advantage/privilege of using MCEM is that if a community does not have funds to hire an external expert for assistance on any particular aspect of the community program, such as program evaluation, they are likely to find the expert or expertise during the engagement process because when they identify and invite stakeholder groups who are located at different engagement levels of society and attain unique knowledge and skills that may vary in nature, scope, and area to share their knowledge, information, experiences in an engaged, collaborative, and reflective

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process that may help to uncover, utilize, and strengthen stakeholder resources and expertise for the community program.

a. **In case study 1**, volunteers who can either participate in or conduct program evaluation can be found in the nongovernment organizations which have been working in the community, child advocacy center, and/or the elementary school.

b. **In case study 2**, volunteers who can either participate or conduct the evaluation of the community program can be found in the nongovernment organizations, the elementary school, and/or the union council office.

26. Finally, it is worth mentioning that MCEM is likely to bring challenges for all relevant stakeholder groups in terms of time, investment, commitment, and motivation to participate in the engagement process of community program that is reflective, open, and trustworthy and that questions power hierarchies, eliminates differences, recognizes all voices, and promotes justice and inclusion for the purpose of successful program outcomes and sustainability. Hence, all relevant stakeholder groups who choose to use MCEM as a roadmap/plan for their community program should be prepared mentally, physically, and socially, be patient during the process, and show dedication in pursuing a shared community vision.

a. **In case study 1**, nongovernment organizations may experience conflict of interest, church and school may be different beliefs about families and the family life. People from the community center, child advocacy center, and support groups may have different visions, approaches, and/or ideas for the community program which makes it harder for stakeholder groups to reach to a consensus or an agreement together.

b. **In case study 2**, there may be a conflict between religious scholars from the mosque and staff from nongovernment organizations due to their different beliefs and ways to practice religion. Stakeholders from the union council office and the elementary school may not get along due to their distinctive ideologies. Hence, this engagement process of a community change and development can be quite challenging and overwhelming for all stakeholder groups but at the end it would pay off when the community will be empowered and show sustainability.

In sum, it is worth mentioning that after a critical examination of both case studies, it is noticed that although both countries (United States and Pakistan) are substantially different in terms of social, economic, and political aspects, the communities located in both countries are equally diverse and complex. These communities are practicing different cultures and facing distinct issues of diversity, which may vary in their nature, scope, and extent. Hence, the aforementioned discussion demonstrates the generalizability and applicability of the Multilevel Community Engagement Model in diverse communities and cultures. MCEM is broad enough that it can be applied to different communities, cultures, and societies and simultaneously it is narrow to an extent that it can be empirically tested and measured, which may help MCEM and its framework to evolve and grow over time and adapt to the unique community needs in the United States, Pakistan, and globally.

#### 4. Conclusion

The current paper presents a description of the Multilevel Community Engagement Model and offers a comprehensive step-by-step framework to researchers, practitioners, and development agencies to effectively work with families living in culturally diverse communities around the world. The author described the use and application of MCEM framework by using two different case studies (United States and Pakistan) that he developed for this purpose. The Multilevel Community Engagement Model and framework may help create a community environment that fosters

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stakeholder engagement, recognizes the voices of underrepresented and underprivileged groups of the population, and decreases power hierarchies among stakeholder groups in the process of program development, implementation, and assessment. MCEM provides researchers, practitioners, and development agencies with a common language and a roadmap to work on to improve communication and efficiency among different agencies globally, which may result in effective community programs and sustainable outcomes. MCEM may help provide a paradigm shift/transformation from bottom-up approaches to increasingly engaged and collaborative community approaches that may also inform strategies and approaches of donor/funding agencies towards community engagement and development.

## 5. Limitations

There are a few limitations of the Multilevel Community Engagement Model and framework, which are discussed in this section. First, MCEM and its step-by-step framework are at the initial stage after their development, they need additional application and testing in different communities, cultures, and societies to show their validity and reliability. Future research, application, and testing of MCEM and its framework in community programs may help them to evolve and adapt to unique community/cultural needs. Second, stakeholder groups need to identify and learn about each other's relevance and areas of expertise to use and apply MCEM and its framework, which may take time, energy, and effort. Finally, a substantial cultural shift is needed to use and apply MCEM and its framework that allows more inclusivity and reconsiders what is known as expertise in the process of program development, implementation, and assessment.

## 6. Implications

The Multilevel Community Engagement Model and the Framework have some important implications for research and practice. First, MCEM and its framework provide a comprehensive plan or a roadmap to researchers, practitioners, and development agencies to effectively develop, implement, and evaluate effective community programs and work with families living in culturally diverse communities globally. Second, MCEM provides a common language to researchers, practitioners, and development agencies around the world to communicate and collaborate, which may increase their efficiency and productivity. Third, MCEM recognizes the voices and strengths of underprivileged and underrepresented groups of the population in community programs and fosters a collaborative learning process, which results in sustainable outcomes and community development. Finally, MCEM is broad enough that it can be applied to different communities, cultures, and societies and simultaneously it is narrow to an extent that it can be empirically tested and measured, which may help MCEM and its framework to evolve and grow over time and adapt to the unique community needs in the United States, Pakistan, and globally.

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