Community Involvement and Social Justice: challenge for individuals, society and government

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Questions:

Most countries are signatories of declarations stating that human rights are the foundation of their states/societies.

- Where are these rights coming from?
- How can a right-based approach shape planning and implementation of social (including health) services?
- Are there principles which can provide more concrete direction on the organization of such services?

Our country reviews lead to observe some fundamental principles of social justice at work: they should inform our vision of community empowerment.
Foundation

- The roots of human rights are to be found in the dignity that belongs to each person.
- Mutual complementarity between rights and duties.
- The right to health is a consequence of the natural right to life and to its preservation.
- Only rational and free members can form a society, since it is a union based on agreement for the attainment of some end. This end will be some common good that all the members will share and no member could accomplish separately.
The common good is realized concretely only in the individuals who make up society, but it is a good that they could achieve only by the cooperative interaction of the many.

It is a very concrete and specific good (e.g. basic health care, education, peace, justice, protection of the environment, provision of essential services) that can be achieved in my community here and now through a cooperative effort.
Freedom and responsibility

- **Freedom** is condition necessary for persons and society to pursue and exercise what appears as a good for them.

- "Positive" freedom ("freedom for") is a feature of and a condition for empowerment.

- It is a response to challenges and opportunities in individual and collective life committing people to a certain line of conduct, i.e. assuming a **responsibility**.
Subsidiarity

- Families, groups, associations, local realities to which people spontaneously give life enable them to achieve an effective personal and social growth.
- The principle of subsidiarity states that it is an injustice to assign to a higher institution or level of the society what a lesser form of social organization can do.
- The approach: a government recognizes and supports as part of the public system other actors that institutionally do not belong to the state. ("public function of private initiative")
- Interventions designed at the level where problems occur.
Solidarity

- Expression by citizens of the need to be united, to share the needs and problems of others and to recognize and defend the dignity of each individual.

- It highlights in a special way the intrinsic social nature of every human person and the equality of all in dignity and rights.

- Stigma and discriminations, violating respect for human dignity, prevent solidarity.

- Solidarity is in action whenever somebody is suffering and a person decides to be next to him/her to share in the distress and provide help; by so doing it provides a most powerful affirmation of the value and dignity of that concrete person.
Empowerment in practice: Participation and involvement of individuals and community are an important implication of subsidiarity. They are expressed by activities through which citizens, individually or in collaboration with others, contribute to the social life of the community to which they belong. Participation in activities that contribute to the common good, built on the awareness that such contribution is possible, is a responsibility and a duty for everybody.

There is a value in partnership that goes beyond the value of its operational return. It strengthens both partners and builds a social capital.

Partnership, even in its less structured forms, is the most effective response to a mentality of social conflict; it is an opportunity to contribute to a public ethic based on solidarity and cooperation.
Conclusions

- **Partnership** between health services, civil society and communities: a paradigm of mutual support and collaboration, rather than confrontation, with beneficial critical function by CBOs.

- **Paradigm shift** from hierarchical relationship to the recognition and respect of the communities' role in health and development.

1. Recognition of different roles
2. Collaboration rather than confrontation defines a society pursuing common good
3. Critical role of CSOs is beneficial for the mandate and responsibility of authorities and institutions.
4. Giving due attention to these principles is a decision of ethical and political nature, which affects the very possibility to establish a partnership, its effectiveness and duration over time.