

Chapter 15

NGCSOs and Capacity Enhancement of Low-Income People in South Australia

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Introduction

Nongovernment community service organisations (henceforth NGCSOs) are catalysts to the implementation of poverty reduction policies as given in the MDG I. By doing so they bridge gaps of exclusion, apathy and ignorance which obstruct even the best designed policy to reduce poverty. Nongovernment organisations exist in every society on the basis of the demands and desires of the clientele they serve as well as on the basis of the self-critical examination of their own organisational performances. Among these NGOs there are some which primarily nurture profit motives in delivering services to their clientele, while there are a few others which aim at community services primarily on the basis of nonprofit works to the disadvantaged sections of the society. The later ones have been termed here as nongovernment community service organisations (NGCSOs). This chapter attempts to explore the impact of NGCSOs on marginalised people living in South Australia, who are excluded from meaningful participation in the society due to their low economic status. On one level this chapter attempts to identify the specific roles which the NGCSOs perform for raising the economic status of the low-income people specifically of Playford and Salisbury, economically two of the most disadvantaged council areas not only in South Australia but also throughout Australia. At another level, this chapter seeks to identify the lacunae in the performances of the NGCSOs vis-à-vis the role of Australian state in developing capability of the low-income people that ultimately limit the purpose of alleviating poverty despite a high payment on welfare purpose.

In the post-1945 period some academic buzzwords have dominated the intellectual world. In this wake, one may find ‘developmentalism’ or ‘development’ since the

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1950s up till the late 1970s then 'globalisation' since the early 1980s up till the late 1990s (Wallerstein 2004, p. 1–3). Since the mid-1990s, more particularly since the publication of 'Governance and Development' (World Bank 1992), the concept that has captivated the social science intelligentsia is 'good governance'. Concept of 'good governance' has firmly re-established the voice of politics over administration, thereby making politics-administration dichotomy that was so eloquently put forward by the founding father of public administration, Woodrow Wilson, and other doyens of the same discipline a bit obsolete.

Those who focus on the role of the NGCSOs for the purpose of poverty alleviation from the perspective of good governance mainly view it from any of the three approaches: (1) sustainable livelihood generation approach; (2) empowerment of disadvantaged sections, viz. indigenous people and/or women approach; and (3) capability development approach. Sustainable livelihood generation approach views that community involvement leads to resource planning and mobilisation in an effective manner which is best suitable for realising the local needs (Krantz 2001). With an approach to empowerment of disadvantaged sections, one may end up with final objective of participation of the people in the lowest rung of social hierarchy or of those who are differentiated on the basis of race, gender, etc., in decision-making process and thereby remain as the victims of social injustice (Narayanan 2003). The capability approach developed by Amartya Sen views capability as 'a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being; [it] represents the alternative combination of things a person is able to do or be' (Sen 1993, p. 30). Those who focus on the capability approach in analysing NGCSOs' role view that community service by the NGCSOs should develop 'capabilities' (potential to achieve) within persons that ultimately can make a difference in their 'functionings' (the actual achievement). This chapter wants to explore the significance that the NGCSOs have assumed in the 'post-welfare' Australia in developing the capabilities of the low-income people in Australia and the method by which such capabilities are attempted to be developed among the 'poor' and of course the limitations of this method.

Despite the sincere attempt on the part of any state authority, it is very difficult to measure the actual alleviation of poverty. This is so because of a growing consensus that the poverty indexes are not only many like income, capability and human goals on life style but also important is 'the choice of space and that of measure (which) tallies with motivation that makes us interested in evaluating inequality and poverty in the first place' (Sen 2006, p. 32–33). Income of course is very important for developing the capability since it makes a person capable to pursue certain goals in human lives. Education and health contain the basic space on which capability of a skilful persuasion of human goals flourishes. But that again becomes very broad without the choice of certain empirical line for identifying difficulties in accessing opportunities for good quality education or health. Fixing up that boundary line for the good quality again becomes subjective. For example, what will be the evidences of good quality health—longevity or the absence of any disease during even a shorter span of life—that becomes a matter of conjecture. Besides, life expectancy or absence of any disease does not depend only upon income but also on a number of factors including environment and

awareness about do's and don'ts for good health. So is child education that does not depend solely on the income of a family. Other than affording school fees, uniform, books or communication infrastructure to reach the school, child education also depends upon the aspiration of the parents about their children, the quality of teachers and the merit of the students.

With these complexities in determining the increase or decrease in poverty, the researchers are often confronted with contradictory findings throughout the world as many people who are identified as poor on the basis of their income are neither deprived nor excluded, while many of those who are deprived or excluded are not income poor, and Australia is also no exception (Saunders and Wong 2009, p. 3). This necessitates one to view the connection between income and capability. Here one comes to the concept of 'relative deprivation' vis-a-vis 'absolute deprivation'. Sen argues, 'A person's ability to be clothed appropriately (or to have other items of consumption goods that have some visibility or social use), given the standards of society in which he or she lives, may be crucial for the capability to mix with the others in that society. This relates directly to relative income vis-à-vis the general level of prosperity in that community. A relative deprivation in terms of income can, thus, lead to absolute deprivation in terms of capabilities, and in this sense, the problems of poverty and inequality are closely interlinked' (Sen 2006, p. 35–36). Consequently, the motivating concerns, which Sen argues as have to be 'related to equity and justice', get priority in dealing with the present issue.

There is currently enough literature to highlight the role of nongovernment organisations in providing aids to the economically challenged people in Australia. Some chapters in two books published by OECD may be referred to in this context which show the pivotal role played by the nongovernment organisations in providing community service. These two books are *Non-governmental Organisations and Governments: Stakeholders for Development* edited by Ian Smillie and Henny Helmich (1993) and *The Non-profit Sector in a Changing Economy* (2003) edited by the OECD. Both the books contain separate chapters on the NGOs in Australia. In *Non-governmental Organisations and Governments: Stakeholders for Development*, other than changing patterns and issues of the NGOs in general, there is a separate chapter on Australia that deals with the history of the official support of OECD and the method of assessing NGO activities which are effective in assisting or promoting sustainable development. In the second book there is a chapter on 'New Trends in the Non-profit Sector in Australia: A Greater Involvement in Employment and Social Policies' written by Julie Novak, which provides an overview of the Australian nonprofit sector and recent trends on the operations of nonprofit organisation.

Besides, one may go through Barbara Rugendyke edited *NGOs as Advocates for Development in a Globalising World* (2007). In the second chapter entitled as 'Charity to Advocacy: Changing Agendas of Australian NGOs', Barbara Rugendyke and Cathryn Ollif have discussed at length with documentation 'the emergence of the voluntary aid movement in Australia, from its genesis in pre-Second World War missionary and charity agencies to the formation of development assistance programmes, the growth in NGO activity, shifting fads in NGO priorities and the reasons for these' (p. 17–43).

This study is based on a mixed method applied during the period between 26 October 2009 and 25 February 2010. First, there was an ethnographic survey of some cultural and educational programmes that are run by the community centres in Playford and Salisbury. Just to mention a few, the author participated in a programme (named as 'Just Too Deadly Awards Night 2009') to celebrate the learning achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are graduating from years 7 to 12 in 2009 in Salisbury Recreation Precinct, Waterloo Corner Road, Salisbury North, and interacted with some guardians present there. The author also had a nonparticipant observation of the programmes that Bagster Road Community Centre (17 Bagster Road, Salisbury North, SA 5108) and Family Zone Ingle Farm Hub at Salisbury Communities for Children (PO Box 144, Para Hills 5096) run. The Bagster Road Community Centre has a 95% economically disadvantaged clientele nature. The Ingle Farm Hub also runs its programmes especially for the economically disadvantaged children and supports their parents, and the researcher had an experience of the feedback of the clients to understand the awareness of the people served. The author also visited the McVitty Community Centre, Davenro Park and Peach Road Residency area. Also day-long nonparticipant observation of the clients in two thrift shops, one in Playford and one in Bute, Adelaide, along with conversations with the customers, was done by the author. Besides, the author attended the Adult Literacy Northern Adelaide Networking Group meeting, held in UniSA Mawson Lakes Campus, that focused on sharing of knowledge and regional information on BKSB (Basic and Key Skills Builder), electronic storage of resumes, numeracy education by all and problems and the solutions regarding the mentioned points in Northern Suburbs of Northern Adelaide. Secondly, other than this ethnographic study, there have been numerous sessions of focused interview with some key officials like Director, Social Inclusion Unit, Govt. of SA; Director Human Services Policy, Govt. of SA; Manager, Health Dept, Govt. of South Australia; Coordinator, Manager of Bagster Road Community Centre, Coordinator and Manager of Salisbury Communities for Children; Program Manager of Northern Adelaide Schooling Initiatives, Northern Area Region; Manager, Playford Salvation Army; General Manager, The Smith Family, SA; and some other academicians, who have done research in the same area. Thirdly, to validate the ethnographic observation by case study, this study has taken up structured interviews of nine volunteers and nine clients of Playford Salvation Army at 39 Kinkaid Rd, Elizabeth East, SA 5112. As for data regarding the socio-economic situation in Australia, the study relies on the data published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Social Policy Research Committee, UNSW, ACOSS and Department of Public Health, Government of South Australia, for argumentation.

'Post-welfare' Australia and the Significance of NGCSOs

Since the 1980s and more specifically since the 1990s, Australian economy has been made open to the world. In effect, that has brought about the changes in social policies that mostly responded to the 'economic rationalism' of the market economy.

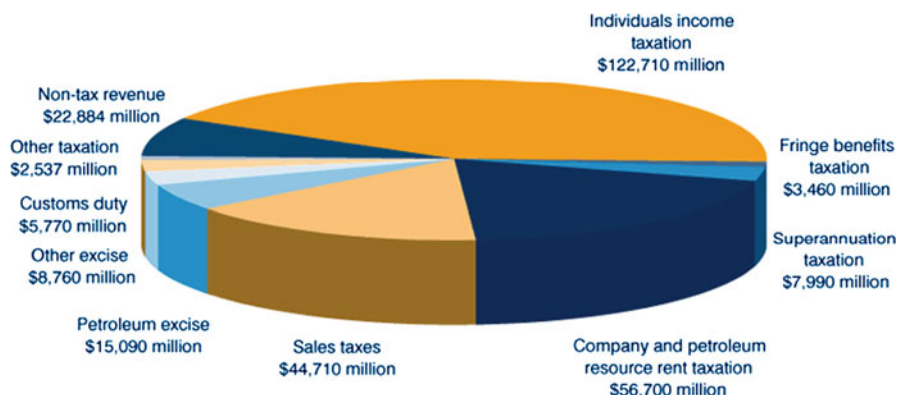


Fig. 15.1 Amount and sources of revenues of Australian Government for the year 2009–2010 (Source: Australian Government, Budget 2009–2010)

Scholars (Jamrozik 2005; Wilson 2006) observe that in the 1980s and 1990s, Australia has been deregulated and been made open to the world economy that has led to economic uncertainty. Especially since 1996, the social policies under the conservative coalition in Australia have been reflecting the implementation of the economic rationalist ideology with ‘an endeavour to control, and preferably reduce, social expenditure’. Because of that economic uncertainty, Jamrozik wanted to refer to the Australian state since then as a ‘post-welfare state’.

Paradoxically it is in this situation of uncertainty that the need for welfare payment becomes high. If one goes by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, then one may find that during 2003–2004, 2004–2005, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007, there has been a marginal increase in the total of ‘all major income support payments and benefits’ which is respectively (in \$’000) 67245049, 66666351, 68484357 and 72176249 during the mentioned years (ABS 2008a—Income and Community Support). But looking at the total public sector operating statement—2005–2006—one may find that the total welfare payments for the year 2005–2006 were almost one fourth of the total commonwealth revenue and expenses for the year 2005–2006 according to government finance statistics [GFS] (ABS, 1301.0—Year Book Australia, 2008b—Public Sector). Total GFS revenue for the year 2005–2006 of the commonwealth was \$285,749 million, and the total GFS expenses of the commonwealth for the same year were \$269,005 million. If one looks at the ‘Appendix G Australian Government taxation and spending’ of 2009–2010 Commonwealth Budget Overview (Australian Government Budget 2009–2010), the summary of the ‘Australian Government revenues and expenses for 2009–2010 on an accrual basis’ may be observed by the following charts (Figs. 15.1 and 15.2)

The diagrams also show that a huge amount of expenses (more than 25%) of the total budget expenses has been laid down for ‘social security and welfare purpose’, even excluding health and education. So what the scholars have argued regarding ‘an endeavour to control, and preferably reduce, social expenditure’ has not been very much substantive going by the data provided by the ABS.

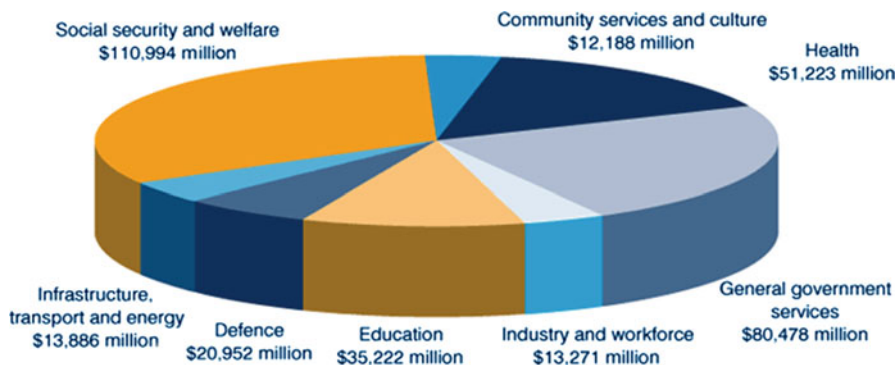


Fig. 15.2 Amount and items of expenditure by Australian Government for 2009–2010 (Source: Australian Government, Budget 2009–2010)

Despite such high social security and welfare payment, it is observed that at the 2001 census, the median weekly personal income of indigenous people in South Australia was 38.9% less than the median weekly income of nonindigenous South Australians, and it is also falling further behind (Hetzel et al. 2004, p. 34). Also compared with other South Australians, Aboriginal people are disadvantaged across ‘a broad range of social and economic factors, including education, health, employment, income and housing’ (Hetzel et al. 2004, p. 9). From this it is obvious that a high welfare payment cannot decrease poverty neither from the perspective of median income nor from the perspective of relative deprivation of the capabilities. In this context the need for raising awareness as well as aspirations of the low-income indigenous people on the basis of a long-term capability development policy remains supreme. So the role of NGCSOs, which comprehend development work as a contribution to liberation, becomes significant.

Service Delivery and the Role of NGCSOs

To alleviate the conditions of these economically disadvantaged people, we have already seen that Federal Government funds a huge amount of money for welfare expenditure. The NGCSOs, some of which are profiteering, also allot a huge amount of money to alleviate these conditions. Of the total \$90 billion welfare expenditure in 2005–2006, cash benefits accounted for \$61 billion (68%) and welfare services (benefit in kind) the remaining \$29 billion (AIHW 2007b, p. xi). According to the same report, while the Australian Government funded all cash benefits in 2005–2006 (\$61 billion), NGCSOs provided most welfare services (\$20 billion worth out of \$29 billion) in 2005–2006 (p. xi). So it will be better to measure the importance of the NGCSOs not in terms of the fund they provide for the welfare services but in terms of the scope of actual welfare services they provide in assisting the needy people to participate in economy as well as in society. This welfare expenditure

includes social security payments and expenditure on welfare services provided to four target groups—families and children, older people, people with disabilities and others (such as widows, indigenous Australians and migrants) (AIHW 2007a, p. 1). However, these expenditure accounts do not include unemployment benefit payments and services which in government terms are classified as ‘labour and employment affairs’ rather than welfare.

Going up by the Connecting Up Australia website (Connecting Up Australia 2006), one may find that there are thousands of NGCSOs throughout Australia. Only in Playford (C) there are 113 organisations that are providing education and 60 organisations that are providing health care. Similarly in Salisbury (C) area, there are a total of 128 organisations that are working in the education sector and 67 organisations are working in the health sector. If the schools, government hospitals and profit-making organisations of various sorts are excluded, one may find almost 31 voluntary NGCSOs are working in the education sector in the Playford Council area and 26 NGCSOs are working in the health sector. In case of Salisbury (Council), the number of the NGCSOs in the education and health sector also will come down in almost the same proportion, despite the fact that the number is not negligible. From the focused interviews it is clear that there are many sources of funding of these NGCSOs: donation, will of a person, fundraising activities, corporate funding, client fees and of course government funding. The role of the NGCSOs includes a variety of assistance to disadvantaged people: (1) providing money/consumable goods as emergency relief; (2) housing support; (3) free tax return; (4) budget or other counselling; (5) advocacy/negotiation with creditors about bills; (6) training regarding child rearing to young mothers; (7) providing toy library to the disadvantaged; (8) providing thrift shop; (9) reaching out to children to bring them to educational institution; (10) providing scholarship for the child’s education; (11) providing low-cost entertainment; and (12) connecting needy people with relevant support services and so on. The list is not exhaustive in any way.

The impact of the services provided by the NGCSOs can be measured in two ways: short term and long term. Short-term impact includes providing means of sustenance as an emergency relief. One of the fundamental missions of these organisations is to provide support to the people in need mainly in terms of food items, clothing and occasionally providing shelter. This is especially so in view of volumes of socio-economic problems existing specifically in Playford and Salisbury. A high rate of unemployment, lack of education, high rate of child abuse and negligence in childcare, giving birth to babies by the mothers at a younger age of between 15 and 19 years, childbirth coming out of wedlock, lack of private communication facility (lack of car, motorbike) and youth problems (being ousted from family, high rate of smoking including drug and physical inactivity)—all these have compounded the social problem of a quality life for the low-income people, who are mostly indigenous by race, to a high level. The role of NGCSOs becomes highly significant in penetrating those problems particularly on a short-term basis.

But that support for emergency relief in many cases leads to dependency since long-term unemployment remains particularly the key cause of poverty in South Australia as has been told by almost all the key officials. Until that problem is

solved, it is difficult to remove the problems discussed above. To eradicate this dependency the NGCSOs have some long-term objectives of capability building. NGCSOs take up a broad range of programmes to improve employment opportunities for low-/non-income people by improving education, health, housing and so on. In fact that long-term objective relates primarily to reorienting social setting and social values. For long-term capability building, the major requirement is counselling and training. The four community centres that the author visited had schools of different ages. While the kids are trained on a regular basis, grown-ups are dealt on weekly or twice in a week basis. Although the dropout rate increases markedly with increasing socio-economic disadvantage (Public Health Information Development Unit 2006), volunteers of the community centres go to the homes of these people to motivate them by raising an aspiration within them. The Manager Salisbury Communities for Children pointed that his centre had about 64 volunteers among whom 34 would go to the home services mostly for removing the difficulties of the early learners, who are children of the uneducated or lowly educated parents or have been suffering from social isolation or require general support. These programmes may be compared on a cross-cultural basis with the *Grihini* programme that is being organised in several states in India, particularly in tribal areas, through voluntary effort. *Grihini* programme aims at development of education among poor young girls. Like *Grihini* programme, the community centres in Salisbury and Playford also emphasise on the significance of integrating critical group and self-reflection as a means of continuous assessment and of involvement of everyone in the programme development. These programmes help in reducing the persistence of intra-household inequalities leading to preferential treatment of male children and members depriving the girls and women on the one hand and attempt at restricting the poverty of the female-headed households by providing short-term relief as well as long-term counselling and training on the other hand.

All the nine volunteers, who were interviewed, underlined on 'counselling' to the question of 'what type of assistance do you provide to the disadvantaged people?' NGCSOs put their effort to bring about a long-term impact in raising the aspiration of the family as well as the child by counselling and by providing scholarships. The general manager of The Smith Family, SA, in his interview, highlighted the data published in Annual Report 2008–2009 (The Smith Family) that '29,457 children and young people accessed Learning for Life scholarships' (p. 16). But such effort is meagre in respect to the requirement. It was interesting to note that the Bagster Road Community Centre also provides counselling to the newlywed husband (mainly from indigenous and African community) in case of a complaint of domestic violence, and as reported by the community centre coordinator, it had been observed that after a few weeks of counselling, the unruly husband normally had become more gentle. As for developing opportunity, NGCSOs, although not often, organise vocational training for some of their clients, who receive welfare payments, free of cost. Two of the nine clients of Playford Salvation Army who would receive welfare payments reported to have capacity-building training (one from TAFE and another from Bank SA).

Two major goals of the NGCSOs in pursuing capacity building are as follows: one, to empower those who are socially, economically and culturally disadvantaged and oppressed so that they may be 'able to appear in public without shame' and two, to establish certain mainstream values so that they are not excluded from social relations and meaningful participation in the social decision-making process. In May 2000, Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS 2000) identified 'three threshold issues for welfare reform' which may be referred to in this context: alleviating poverty and the poverty traps that cause hardship and constrain or prevent participation, clarifying the framework which will underpin participation requirements and specifying the nature and quantum of resources that need to be invested to improve outcomes for individuals, families and society as a whole. Going by the facts and figures, these three still now remain topical especially from the perspective of capability building. In the long term, alleviation of poverty requires a community-oriented approach that can ensure participatory framework rather than an individualistic one. There are certain institutional limitations of the NGCSOs in adopting a community-oriented approach. First, the volunteers are mostly from the white community and give time after completing their occupational responsibilities. Hence, despite their commitment (not all volunteers are skilled in communication), they are often perceived as 'outsiders' by their clients of the indigenous community. Secondly, resource crunch is always a great challenge for the NGCSOs. Thirdly, due to poor infrastructure in the clientele area, the disadvantaged people are mostly disconnected from the rest of Adelaide. In this context Australian state has a great role to play in developing a legislative framework that will be congenial to community-oriented approach and would soften the harshness of the punitive model of state.

The Role of Australian State

In Australia, casting one's vote is mandatory. That leads to the mandatory voting by the people, but they do not remain interested in the community affairs once the people's representatives are elected. Ideally there should be some legal structural framework for community participation for at least twice a year for making decisions for the community in general at the grassroots level. Any structural framework at the rural level, like *Gramsabha* in India, for planning the work of development and for assessing the implementation of that plan by the rural local council, may lead to the empowerment and increased participation of the disadvantaged people in community affairs. With the increased participation, the disadvantaged people may then decide what kind of training/welfare payment they need to continue as Australian citizens with dignity. Once this legal structural framework is established, NGCSOs then may put their efforts to train a person to develop his skill for social participation. That not only would lead to their social inclusion but that also is bound to decrease relative deprivation of the economically disadvantaged people.

Although Federal Government spends a lot, some questions about the methodology of social welfare payment may be raised in this context. Sen (1997/1996) has shown, 'Even though unemployment benefits and social security may reduce the impact of the extraordinary levels of high unemployment on European income inequality in particular, the persistence of unemployment leads to many kinds of deprivation that are not reflected at all in the income statistics' (p. 389). So Federal Government should spend more money on creating employment opportunities and providing free vocational training for the disadvantaged sections rather than spending on their social welfare pension in whatever form it may be like single-parent pension or unemployment pension. Training of vocational work rooted in community culture may lead to self-employment as well. It has also been found that there is an inconsistency of policies to be pursued on the government front. The target group of the government fund is continuously shifting, mainly due to immediate political priorities. The major target group, when the study was done, was young people with age group of 18–25. For pursuing the long-term goal by the NGCSOs in the sphere of child education or health, this becomes a real problem.

Lastly, the long-term policies should be pursued for transforming Australia from a 'punitive society' to a reformatory society. In most cases, authorities in Australia, both in society and in state, employ heavy punishment for ensuring loyalty. But there is little effort to do away with the socio-economic causes that lead people to act in a recalcitrant way. With such reorientation of government policies, the NGCSOs in South Australia will have a better role in developing capability of the disadvantaged people in an organised community.

Conclusion

This chapter started with an aim to explore the role of NGCSOs in developing the capability of the low-income people of South Australia through the delivery of their services from the perspective of good governance. Good governance in fact entails two basic issues: an inclusive growth and the participation of the citizens in processes of governance to ensure that growth. Hence, the challenge of good governance is 'to construct consent to a course of action on the basis of argument and public evidence'. On the basis of arguments placed in the text, one may conclude that NGCSOs deliver immense services to the isolated communities for coping up with the challenges posed over them by their economic position. But long-term poverty alleviation, which Millennium Development Goals vow, requires an inclusive growth for the economically challenged people on the basis of their participation in the governance process. For that matter NGCSOs should underpin participation requirements in their counselling and other forms of service delivery and emphasise upon the resources those need to be invested to improve 'functioning' of the disadvantaged individuals and their families.

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