Authentic Community Development: Principles and Fundamentals

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Abstract

Authentic community development is an essential process which endeavors to empower communities towards self-propelled and sustainable development. Being a process, it is guided by a set of principles and fundamentals which qualify it as authentic, participatory, inclusive, empowering and sustainable. Authenticity of community development is dependent on adherence to key guiding principles and fundamentals including holism, human orientation, participation, diversity, ownership, sustainability, promotion of equity, among several others. It is crucial that principles and fundamentals of authentic community development show clearly what their contribution to development is. As it is with principles and fundamentals in other disciplines, adherence to and practice of these principles and fundamentals poses major challenges to practitioners, policy makers, funders, governments and other stakeholders of community development. This article outlines and expounds various principles and fundamentals that guide authentic community development.

Key Words: Authentic, Community, Development, Fundamentals, Principles,

1. Introduction: Community development as a social science, practice and approach is guided by underlying principles and fundamentals. However, it is important to note that there exists a thin line between conceptualization, theorization and definition of principles and fundamentals of community development. To some, it could be one and the same thing while to others, it means two different things altogether. For community development to be regarded as authentic, it must be geared towards attainment of social justice, self-determination, working and learning together, participation, reflective practice, sustainable communities, among other deliverables. Community development that meets some needs and ignores the others cannot be considered authentic. The discussions in this paper are based on relevant literature review, own conceptualization, observations and personal field experiences.

2. Background: Community is as old as humanity itself and for the last two hundred years, the word community has been defined by different people in different times in different ways, and it is still a difficult term to comprehend (Sajid, nd).

Chambers (1994) observes that over the years, there have been shifts in rural development which has involved reversals from top-down to bottom-up, from blueprint to learning process and a leaning towards community oriented and people driven development approaches. Dimensions of community development are multiple, ranging from social, economic, spiritual, political, cultural and environmental, among others. These dimensions are geared towards meeting concrete or abstract human needs and rights, key of which are participation, self - determination and protection, among many others.

According to Ife (2002:204), '…community development is not governed by simple technical law of cause and effect but it is a complex and dynamic process, teaching and nurturing this development is more of an art than science'. It takes place in complex, dynamic and heterogeneous environments, without a single rule of thumb for mastery. Further, Ife (ibid) argues that community development seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing these groups with the skills they need to effect change for the betterment of their own communities.

3. Definition and conceptualization of terminologies:

Principle: According to Mulwa (2010:94), 'principle can be defined as an accepted or professed rule of action. It is a fundamental, primary, or general law or truth from which policies, decisions and actions are derived'. A principle is a statement of fundamental truth which describes the occurrence of things or phenomena as they are, what is basic or essential and what works and what does not and why. Principles are standards which are generalized expressions of rules of sound practice (Sajid, nd). Principles therefore provide frameworks for analysis and interpretation of various phenomena.

Community: A community is a group of two or more people who are connected through common interests and characteristics and/or a geographic location and/or identity in social-cultural, political, economic or professional spheres. According to Popular Oxford dictionary, the word 'community' implies togetherness, which connotes an organization of human beings framed for the purpose of serving together (Sajid, nd).

Development: The concept of development has several different and opposing definitions which are based on the interests of different groups and each group defines development in a way that benefits it (Mchombu et al., 2004). The term development implies improvement of social, political, economic, infrastructural and physical conditions in a community. Siraj (1980) as cited by Sajid (nd) defines development as a purposive change in a society to achieve an improved state of socio-economic conditions. Development connotes advancement of status of human beings, resulting to improved quality of life of people in all spheres that affect their daily life. In the context of community development, development is therefore a process for enhancing the wellbeing of a given community.

Community Development: Sajid (ibid) defines community development as the purposeful effort by community people to learn and work together to guide the future development of their communities by making full use of their own as well as external resources for their own betterment. Moreover, Chitere (1999) contends that community development is a method, a process, movement, means to an end, among many other concepts. Community development is about social change through a long-term process that needs to be holistic and responsive to local circumstances and needs (REGLAP, 2012). Ife (2002) argues that community development is by its nature a long term process. It entails working with the people and not working for them, providing opportunities for improvement of people's lives, building relations between community members and enhancing capacities of communities to take charge of their own development. This involves creation of conditions that will facilitate multidimensional progress for the whole community with its active participation by going through various stages that are implemented linearly and vertically to cater for the needs of and improve the way of life for a given community. Ife (2002) explains that community development implies helping communities to articulate their needs and act accordingly to meet the needs. It means initiating interventions to address development needs and gaps in provision of solutions not only for concrete but also abstract needs. Community development facilitates manipulation of factors that contribute towards change of a state of need to a state of self -support and an end product of self - sustenance.

Authentic Community Development: Authentic development is one that is homegrown and organically initiated with the local people taking centre stage in the entire development cycle. It is what is called balanced development, which seeks to initiate development from the centre of the wheel, with effects rippling to the periphery. It can also be described as development of the people, by the people, for the people, using locally available resources and indigenous technical knowledge that ensures sustainability. As advanced by Mulwa (2010) authentic community development is not only signified by the end (results), but also the means (process). Authentic and genuine community development necessitates empowerment, transformation and the participation of all segments of the community including the marginalized people in their own development by strengthening their ability to identify their needs, decide best way to meet the needs, and to demand better services and accountability from development stakeholders (REGLAP, 2012).

4. Principles and Fundamentals of Authentic Community Development: Authentic community development deviates from the mainstream conventional approaches to participatory, people centered development. Adoption and practice of authentic community development requires a mindset change for both communities and development practitioners. Authentic community development means

starting from the centre with ripple effects, impacts and benefits thereof spreading out to the periphery. Authentic community development demands that the community be at the centre of the wheel to able to spin it and manage the process and speed of their development. Authentic development must involve all constituents as equal and valuable partners. The implementation of authentic community development means the realization that resources, ideas, knowledge and skills can all be found within communities.

Authentic community development is guided by principles which are rules which determine right action or value-judgment as to what is sound or good community development practice (Sajid,nd). However, it is important to note that there is no "recipe" for a process of community development but rather, it is a set of key flexible principles which guide the process of engagement and action (Cavaye, nd). Below are a set of principles and fundamentals that guide authentic community development.

4.1 Principle of Participation.: Participation as a means to empowerment and consciousness raising, is a very crucial aspect of authentic community development. In the process of authenticity in community development, structures and processes should not be alienating to the beneficiaries but instead, they must enhance participation. Community participation spins the wheel from top - down, imposed to bottom – up, self-motivated and involving status. The principle of participation is embedded on the bedrock of people doing it themselves in partnership with development agents. As advanced by Mulwa (2010), participation is a paradigm shift that seeks to correct anomalies of the conventional development paradigms and authentic community development should of necessity mainstream active participation in the entire process. In this principle, development constituents are part of the community development entire process. According to this principle, everyone has a valuable contribution to make towards their development (FCLC, nd). Further, this principle takes cognisance of the fact that empowerment results from influence and participation, and by supporting communities to gain skills to engage in participation through developing of structures that enable communities to participate effectively. Participation principle as discussed by Ife (2002), ensures that community development must always seek to maximize participation, with the aim being for everyone in the community to actively participate in community processes and activities, aimed at recreating community and personal futures. People must be enabled to participate in the entire development process since they know their problems better, they understand and appreciate their environments better, they can use their own resources and indigenous technical knowledge and they can be able to own the results as their own initiative in 'we did it ourselves'.

4.2 Principle of Valuing Local:
a) Knowledge and Skills: The sub-principle of valuing local considers local knowledge and skills as very crucial in viable community development. Indigenous technical knowledge and skills must be recognized and valued. As Ife (2002) argues, the principle of valuing local knowledge simply states that local knowledge and expertise are likely to be of most value in informing community development and they must be identified and validated rather than subordinated to the knowledge and expertise of outside experts. In this principle, a community development process should seek to identify local knowledge, to assess the extent of local expertise, whether formally recognized or not, and realize that external expertise can only help a community in a general way and not in terms of specific programs (Ife, ibid). This principle acknowledges that local skills and knowledge are more applicable and sustainable and therefore they should be natured and a two-way transfer, exchange and sharing established.

b) Cultures: Local cultures are very crucial especially in sustainable use of resources. Culture being what gives communities an identity and self-value should be a key component of authentic community development. The principle of valuing local culture requires that cultural traditions and processes be validated and supported as part of a community development process (Ife, ibid). Culture can promote adoption or rejection of development initiatives. Further, (Ife, ibid) acknowledges that community development itself cannot be imposed on people but it must be genuinely developed within the community, in a way that fits the specific extent and is sensitive to local community, culture, traditions and environment.

c) Resources: This sub-principle of valuing local resources encompasses all forms of local resources e.g. financial, technical, natural and human. Key to authentic community development is resource

mobilization and sustainable utilization of the available resources. In sustainable and viable community development, the community mobilizes and uses its own material and monetary resources to attain her development goals (Chitere, 1999). Further, Hope and Timmel (2000) observe that communities have many resources and with these resources (both human, material and monetary), communities can engage in community development initiatives that can change the state of communities from an undesirable state to a desirable state. Use of local resources makes sure that communities do not always depend on external funding that comes with too many conditionalities without self-reliance. Ife (2002) further posits that community development that cannot be done with local resources is not worth doing at all. This points to the fact that local resources are very crucial in authentic community development.

d) Processes: This is a sub-principle of valuing local in community development which argues that the imposition of solutions, structures or processes from outside the community seldom works. Communities usually have clearly set, stipulated and acceptable processes on decision making and development. For community development to be authentic, processes that are used in development initiatives need not be imported from outside, and instead they should be local community processes that are well understood and accepted by the local community (Ife, ibid).

4.3 Principle of Organic Development (as opposed to Makeshift / Mechanistic Development): Organic development can be described as development that starts from the grassroots, initiated by communities to meet their development needs. Organic development is development that originates and grows spontaneously as a result of real felt needs, based on homegrown priorities and alternatives, using indigenous technical knowledge for sustenance and sustainability. Authentic community development is basically the '... need to allow structures and processes to develop organically from the community itself (Ife, 2002:200). Further, Ife (2002: 204) qualifies it by explaining that, 'organic development means that one respects and values the communities particular attributes and allows and encourages it to develop in its own unique way, through an understanding of complex relationship between the community and its environment'. Organic development starts where people are, and the existing concerns and situation of people is the starting point of development initiatives (Cavaye, nd). REGLAP (2012) argues that in this principle, priority is given to the needs and interests that the community identifies as their starting point and that there be homegrown interventions to meet the needs.

4.4 Principle of Inclusivity and Community Building: Authentic community development should be inclusive and embrace provision of equal opportunities for and contributions from all sections of people, irrespective of any differences. This encourages diverse sectors of the community to participate (Sajid, nd; Cavaye, nd ; FCLC, nd). The principle of inclusivity means that the community development process must include all the community members irrespective of their gender, religion, race, age or socio-economic status in the community. Applying the principle of inclusiveness to community development requires that processes always seek to include rather than to exclude, that all people be intrinsically valued, and that people be allowed space to change their positions on an issue without 'losing face' in the community (Mulwa, 2010). Inclusivity includes ability to make decisions that dictate the direction the community wants to take to better themselves.

This is a principle that implies that community development in not only an initiative to address needs but also a process that uses community structure strengthening, organizing and mobilizing strategies to better the community. 'The principle of community building simply states that the process of community development should always seek to bring people together, to strengthen the bonds between community members, and to emphasize the idea of interdependence rather than independence'(Mulwa, 2010: 223-224). This means that although communities are heterogonous, community development must endeavor to create homogeneity in order to achieve just and fair development.

4.5 Principle of Empowerment: Empowerment is a key principle in community development. Empowerment is not only a principle but also its one of the ultimate goals of community development. According to Mulwa (2010:98), 'essentially, empowerment can be conceptualized as the capacity to manage our own life, whether as an individual or as a community'.Empowerment as a process respects, values and enhances people's ability to have control over their lives and it also

encourages people to meet their needs and aspirations in a self-aware and informed way by utilising their skills, experience and potential (FCLC,nd). As Ife (2002) argues, empowerment should be an aim of all community development. Empowerment means giving people (including the poor, minority and marginalized community members) the power to be able to make decisions, choices and directions that will lead to an improvement of their lives. It means that beneficiaries being the major stakeholders in the development process have the power to manage their own development.

Authentic community development must address powerlessness by removing or ameliorating the barriers to people's complete control of their own destinies. Community empowerment leads to self-determination, self-help and self-reliance among beneficiaries by supporting rather than leading them. Ife (2002:53) argues that 'empowerment aims to increase the power of the disadvantaged'. Moreover, empowerment as a community strategy requires that the barriers to people exercising power be understood, addressed and overcome (Mulwa, 2010). In any case, 'any increase in empowerment for more disadvantaged sections of the community will help to bring about a more socially just society, and the empowerment of members of a local community will strengthen that community and will enable more effective community- based structures to be put in place' (Ife,2002: 209).

4.6 Principle of Ownership: According to Mulwa (2010), ownership as a principle of authentic community development is anchored on the premises that people will identify with, protect and maintain what they have toiled to build. The ownership in authentic community development starts from the visioning, conceptualization to implementation of development projects. In this principle, the community fully owns the development process and any benefits thereof and only gets external technical support in form of training and supportive capacity when they request for it. Ontario Health Communities Coalition (n.d) observes that communities thrive when they develop their own assets, own their problems and issues and they work together to develop homegrown solutions. Cavaye (nd) corroborates that by arguing that through community ownership, the community itself makes and implements decisions to change their lives.

4.7 Principle of Diversity: Diversity is a crucial principle that is important in authentic community development. Diversity is expected within and without. As Ife (2002) explains, all community development processes are context – specific and they cannot be understood in terms of universal rules. In this principle, it is observed that community is made of several segments of stratification either vertically or horizontally. Community development values diversity between communities, and accepts that different communities will have different ways of doing things, rather than imposing a 'right' way to do things (ibid). Diversity ensures that there is complimentality that seeks to enrich the entire development process.

4.8 Principle of Sustainability: Sustainability is another principle of authentic community development. Sustainability is embedded on inter and intra-generational interdependence and therefore authentic community development is tied to sustainability. This means the ability to take care of a communities' today's needs must not compromise tomorrow's generations to take cater of their needs. Ife, (2002) observes that it is essential that any community development activity occurs within a framework of sustainability otherwise it will simply reinforce the existing unsustainable order, and will not be viable in the long term. Further still Ife (ibid) argues that if community development is to be part of the establishment of a new social, economic and political order, its structure and processes must be sustainable. This means that any viable community development initiative must put into consideration the issue of sustainability in terms of extraction and exploitation of resources as raw materials and factors for production.

4.9 Principle of Addressing Structural Injustices and Discourse of Disadvantaged: This is a principle in community development that not only initiates projects but seeks to address underlying impediments to development. There should be a systematic analysis of internal and external factors that entrench inequities. Community development should address issues of class, gender, race, ethnical, age, disability and sexuality by ensuring that power relations, in which structural inequalities are addressed by any community development initiative (Ife, 2002). In this principle, community development should not by any means reinforce structural oppression. Also, this principle recognises that the community is not a homogenous group and therefore efforts need to be made to ensure all community members benefit from development processes (REGLAP 2012). Community development

should enhance social justice towards class, gender, race, ethnic opposition and inequalities. This principle advocates for a fair distribution of resources and power between people so as to improve the social, environmental, economic and cultural infrastructures within their communities (FCLC,nd).

4.10 Principle of Holism (Wholism): Holism is a principle based on the fact that any development in one sector of the community will affect other spheres in a way. Community development should adopt and adapt a holistic approach in addressing community needs. As Ife (2002) explains, the principle of holism applies ``to all aspects of community development, at analysis as well as practice levels. Cavaye (nd) argues that a holistic approach is used in building economic, human, social and environmental aspects of community as an interrelated whole. Ife (2002) further observes that development holism should emphasize the importance of ripple effect where every development initiative in one sphere has a ripples-like effect on other spheres in the system. It should entail balanced development that caters for all spheres of a human life by recognising that social, economic and political needs are inter-twinned.

4.11 Principle of Learning: The principle of learning is crucial in the attainment of authentic community development. According to Mulwa (2010:100), 'there is wide consensus in community development practice today that true transformation is born of a learning attitude perfected by dialogue with others'. Chitere (1999) further argues that community development is a means for taking the knowledge to people and making use of the knowledge in improving their living conditions. Development practitioners can impart knowledge with the aim of building capacities of the communities. This means that development should be a continuous learning process that ensures that development practitioners engage target communities in practical action oriented learning. This results in capacity building as a strategy and end product of learning. Knowledge learnt has to be adaptive and with ability to address people's development needs. The learning should be reflective, with best practices learnt duplicated in other places or projects or scaled-up. This enhances building and supporting of skills, knowledge, abilities and resilience of people that results to self-development (FCLC,nd).

4.12 Principle of Adaptiveness (Not Blue Print Planning): This is a principle that dictates that community development needs to be context specific and that there are no universal ways of doing development projects. This principle emphasizes the need to plan and learn with people based on experimentation. Sajid (nd) contends that development should be adaptative to suit different conditions and situations. As Lele (1976) further argues, development planning should be based on adequate knowledge of local constraints and not blue printing because adaptiveness to local conditions is a critical pre-liquisite for viable community development. Social, political and economic environments must be factored in the entire development process.

4.13 Principle of Release as Opposed to Relief: This is a principle that is based on the need for the external 'experts' to let go the control of development process so that communities can have full grip and control. This principle gives the community the mantle to mobilize and utilize their resources as opposed to depending on the outside donor-manipulated assistance which creates a vicious cycle and trap of dependency and apathy. This principle makes it possible for communities to regain confidence in their ability to manage their own lives, and development agencies must be willing to let go.

4.14 Principle of Consciousness Raising: The principle of consciousness raising is important for community development (Ife, 2002). This is a principle that dictates that community development should aim and result in raising communities' consciousness to their needs and ability to initiate their own development. This principle ensures that community members are well aware and empowered to make decisions on their destinies and make choices regarding their development.

4.15 Principle of Linking the Global and the Local: This is a principle that puts into perspective the fact that the world has become a global village and no local development can take place independent of the happenings in the globe. Ife (2002) observes that there is globalization of the world and the practice of community development cannot ignore global issues, however local its focus may appear to be. There must be linkage of local to global which leads to exchange of ideas, knowledge, approaches, methodologies and best practices in community development.

4.16 *Principle of Simplicity and Not Complexity:* *This is a principle that makes community development adapt the idea of simplifying the process as opposed to complex ambiguous development interventions. As Mulwa (2010:102) argues, 'the smaller and simpler project, the easier it will be to get long-lasting results'. Piecemeal and cumulative community development is more effective as opposed to big chunks which are not manageable and sustainable, leading to massive project failure.*

4.17 Principle of Human Orientation: Principle of human orientation shows that any community development must be based on the fact that it recognizes and strives to cater for abstract verses concrete needs. Mulwa (2010) notes that any community development initiative ought to alleviate poverty and suffering through meeting peoples basic needs, but neglecting their abstract needs is defective development and cannot qualify to be authentic.

4.18 Principle of Means Justifies the End: This is a principle that means that the quality of community development is in the process and not the end product alone. In this principle, community development is essentially about a process rather than an outcome, about a journey rather than the destination, and hence it is important to focus on processes as well as results (Ife, 2002).

Conclusion: Authentic community development is a long term process that is based on small but incremental improvement in communities' living standards. Authentic community development must promote social justice, cohesion and sense of belonging and one that not only liberates but also empowers. Authentic community development should not only cater for concrete needs but also abstract needs. It should be holistic and transformational in nature, meaning that, it caters for the social, economic, political as well as intellectual needs of human beings. There are a set of principles and fundamentals that guide practice of authentic community development. Principles and fundamentals of authentic development values people and places them at the centre of the wheel. Key to effectiveness of these principles and fundamentals is that if development agents adhere to them religiously, they can be viable vehicles and catalysts of authentic community development.

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