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ADOPTION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF AUTONOMY IN THE PROMOTION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper presents autonomy as a principle rooted in ethics – a normative branch of philosophy which applies to most human development activities. Since community development activities continue to grow both in developing and developed countries with its attendant agitations for autonomy, it is proposed that autonomy should be adopted for grassroots development. Autonomy remains an ingredient that can unleash massive human potentials within people and harness local resources in communities in order to promote broad based human sustainable growth and development. The members of various localities ought to be involved in the articulation of their own felt needs and running of their own affairs without inhibiting external assistance. So, external assistance should submit to the overriding interests and aspirations of the people so as to address the difficulties of sustainability in development programmes. This paper proposes autonomy as an ethical value in community engagement.

Keywords: Adoption, autonomy, community development practices, principle, promotion

Introduction

As widely documented in literature, community development has a variety of principles that guide its practices in distinct communities, and these principles are felt-need, self-help, citizen engagement, self-growth, self-reliance, self-direction, and self-determination have been analyzed by numerous community development researchers throughout the years (Anyanwu, 1999 and Abiona, 2009) These principles guide for developmental activities for them to be sustainable in any community.

These principles of community development mentioned are self-related principles. In the same vein autonomy refers to self. Merriam-Webster dictionary (2023) refers to autonomy as the quality or state of self–governing. This reminds one of the struggle for independence, especially, in African countries which lasted for many decades. Despite the attainment of self-determination of different countries in Africa, some tiers of governments and government agencies still seek autonomy in the contemporary society. Efforts of local government and public universities in the recent years in Nigeria are examples that autonomy is a valuable principle in governance, not only for the state, but also its agencies (Amadioha, 2017; Amah, 2018). The trade unions in Nigerian public

universities have agitated severally through industrial actions for the autonomy of the university system. Whether government agencies can have autonomy while still depending on governments for its funding would continue to be an issue for discussion. Government continually argued that the person who pays the piper should dictate the tune of music. This statement would make one asks the question who truly pays the piper, is it the tax payers or the few who rule at a particular time or the political sovereignty given every four years through franchise? This paper critically analyses the principle of autonomy and advances it as a broad concept for understanding other self-related principles in community development while arguing at the same time for its adoption as a principle of community development.

Autonomy

The term autonomy came from the Greek word av'tovouia, the term literally means living by one's own law. The word appears to be a combination of auto - (avtoc,) which means "Self" and nomos (vouoc,) which is a combining form of Greek origin meaning law, order, arrangement, systemized knowledge of something (vocabulary.com). It also indicates the science or laws governing a certain field of knowledge. Since a city-state has self-rule or governance, "autonomy" alludes to such. This study contends that community autonomy, which offers a community the freedom to make decisions and put those decisions into action to determine its members' fate, should be included among the principles of community development.

Principle of Autonomy

Ancient Greek philosophy, specifically the concept of self-mastery, contains the foundations of autonomy as self-determination. As seen by Plato's depiction of this half of the soul as a being, compared to a

wildlife or monster. Aristotle and Plato both believed that the reasoning element of the inner self is what defines humanity core fundamentally. According to Plato, a soul is just when its reasoning human component rules above each one. The Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle describes the intellectual aspect of the soul as being genuinely an individual's own.

Kant (1996:17) explained that Plato and Aristotle equally believed that independence from people and autonomy were essential elements of the ideal person. According to Aristotle, autarkeia, or autonomy, is a necessary component of pleasure and entails an absence of dependency on outside factors. The most suitable individual is likely someone that is guided by logic as well as is independent in terms of satisfaction.

During the Stoic school of thought, the concept persisted, even Spinoza's earliest contemporary philosophy reflects it. The contemporary era saw a decline in supremacy of religion, a rise in freedom in politics, and a focus on rationality that contributed to the continuous development of the idea of autonomy alone. In accordance with his concept of ethical autonomy as self-mastery, Rousseau connected democracy as well as a right to vote with these concepts.

Kant expanded on the concept of ethical autonomy by defining it to mean exercising influence on someone's conduct. Kant connected the concept of autonomy to ethical conduct, by encouraging the ability to establish its own set of values in contrast to relying on our elected officials, spiritual figures, or community in order to do that. Contrary to staying submissive to an outside-imposed laws or spiritual precept, an individual ought to be submissive to an individual's personal forced laws. Heteronomy, in the initial case, and

independence in the second. He defined illumination in his paper *What exactly is Awareness* "as" "an individual departure out of his self-incurred minority" and urged his audience to possess the guts to apply their own judgment "devoid of directions by anyone". Although Kant's narrative is strongly grounded in his ethical theory, it is near to a concept we could recognize as autonomy for oneself presently (Kant 1996:17).

Kantian Autonomy

Unlike the prehistoric age when autonomy meant only freedom and was used to describe city states rather than people, Kant changed the idea of moral philosophy by referring to autonomous ethical beings as having autonomy. The idea of autonomy was then relegated to philosophical obscurity by the close of the early contemporary period; it was not even mentioned (Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1967).

Immanuel Kant's idea of autonomy has had the highest impact on current discourse. Contrary to modern theories, Kant believed that ethics and autonomy were inextricably linked. Kant's Theory of Morality was based on the Renaissance customs of ethics as autonomy, which he rejected in favour of prior moral theories that presumed legal compliance. The proposition that someone's activity connects to the person and should not be influenced by the government, the church, or anyone else was the foundation of this novel ethics, which launched a distinctive Modern liberal vision of "proper relations amongst people and community." (Kant, 1998).

A clear difference underlying ethical conduct and actual outcomes and implications served as the foundation of Kant's philosophy. Kant was a physicist and an ethical theorist who sought to reconcile Newtonian physics with moral theory and to describe ethical drive without subjecting it to causality in the world as we know it. He required a framework that was different from the way we view the natural world in order to do this. According to Kant, morality is a unique type of causality that has its roots beyond the physical globe's empirical causes and effects cycle. The possibility to "make actions occur deliberately and for rationale"(Kant, 1998) or, to put it another way, the recognition of rewards, aims, or ideas as being adequate drives for prompting us to act, is where the knack for will arises.

In the absence of this special skill, it would be impossible for a human to have moral responsibility since judgment would be subject to the same rules that regulate the behaviour of plants, animals, and geophysical phenomena. Although Kant is not a rationalist, it is important to appreciate his view that people are fundamentally rational beings in order to fully comprehend his moral theory (Kant, 1998).According to Kant, autonomy is a characteristic of the human will, or more specifically, the will of those people who are capable of logical contemplation. Will is a comprehensive ethics which indicates which one aims to achieve by hauling out a specific action; to will something is to choose a general principle that conveys that which one wish to achieve by hauling out a specific action. Intention and outcome, in Kant's view, are always related (Manna& Nath, 2021).

The ability of the will to act autonomously of all the characteristics of the things it chooses to do is known as its autonomy. According to the autonomy principle, one should "never choose except that one's maxims be concurrently acknowledged with it in the same determination as universal law. "Since it is an artificial proposition that commands

apodictically, someone should go outside object cognition to a critique of the subject, i.e., pure practical reason, in order to show that this practical norm is an imperative and that every rational being's will is inexorably linked to it as a condition. However, this enterprise is not easy" (Hill, 1989:97).

However, a simple analysis of ethical ideas can demonstrate that the specified principle of autonomy is the only ethical principle. This leads to the realization that its guiding principle must be a categorical imperative; nonetheless, it does not command anything other than this autonomy. However, it is easily demonstrated that the stated principle of autonomy is the only moral principle by studying the many moral theories. Its principle must be a categorical imperative since it is found in this way, but it does not demand anything more or less than this autonomy.

Community autonomy

The idea of community autonomy affirms the point made by Flores (1999) that community autonomy is not just the process but is also a consequent of an activity. As an outcome of a process, community autonomy allows the community to collectively interact with neglectful and irresponsible government from a position of independence and strength. This paper prescribes community autonomy as a principle in community development. This principle emphasises on the need for community to have freedom in deciding their development. The sense of belong should be taken into consideration as part of the process of fostering community activities. The members of the locality should be enlightened to understand that they own the process to their development. Autonomy has explained earlier means self-governance which shows that the people have the right to self-governance towards the development of their

community. A problem that is self-identified and solved has a lasting impact than that which is identified and solved by an external body.

It is a common belief in the African society that training of a child is the responsibility of every adult in the community and they have the right to contribute to the development of the child morally. This shows that the opinion the people cannot be underrated if the success of any programme within the community is to be assured and sustained. It is very important for all the various developmental agencies to ensure that community autonomy is properly utilized to bring about the success of any developmental activities.

Community autonomy is very crucial in the development process of any community for every member of the community to have a sense of belonging and derive pride in the ownership of any community projects and programmes initiated, that is geared towards grassroots development. Community development practice becomes effective and efficient when community members can exercise self-governance as regards the development of their community.

Community projects and programmes that are designed to meet their identified needs in the community can be planned and carried out with the help of valuable and underutilized human and material resources. Community autonomy in respect to the above gives community members the ability of independent decisions making in the entire developmental process of their community, therefore, creating room for sustainable development.

Analysis of autonomy as a principle in community development

Community autonomy is being prescribe by the researcher as a principle in community development. This principle emphasises on

the need for community autonomy towards their development should be taken into consideration as part of the process of fostering community activities. The members of the locality should be enlightened to understand that they own the process to their development.

Hanactor (2010) in Goodenough (1963) states that developmental programmes endorse with the intention of lordly one's opinion on people and convincing them of the absurdness of community course and the wisdom of one's counsel invariably meet with resistance.

Principle of autonomy and sustainable community development

The value of Autonomy towards community development sustainability cannot be underestimated in that for any community development programme or project to enjoy sustainability, the community members must drive ownership towards such programme. Autonomy as an ethical principle gives them the right to initiate the process of a community development programme base on their need's identification within their community.

Most community development programmes initiated by government, non-governmental agencies and international development partners have experienced lack of sustainability in the sense that after period such programmes become a shadow of itself, and the facilities and projects established become deteriorated. Therefore, formulating autonomy as an ethical principle in community development enables every community member to see development as their responsibility. Hence, the need to take initiative into identifying their felt need in the community and planning towards using the available resources within their community to solve such problem and not totally dependent on external bodies to initiate the process for them.

Moreover, various developmental agencies should take into consideration the interest of the people towards the development of their community in the case where they are trying to assist a community by providing various developmental facilities, the people must be contacted and encourage to identify their problems themselves after which they can be asked to point out the most pressing needs which they will be ready to solve with the available resources within their community after which they can be assisted by such agencies. Hence, the people can be guided but not to be commanded on how their developmental process should go by the agencies. Therefore, autonomy is desirable in and of itself. The concept of autonomy refers to the metaphysical freedom that individual has to select the objectives and course of action in order to realize potential. Since autonomy can be viewed as a basic metaphysical quality of a person that is desirable, a person's acts and choices of objectives are derived from a reasonable will. Autonomy of the community gives rooms for every individual within community to achieve self-actualization (Witmer – Rich, 2020).

The implication of autonomy for community development

A major problem faced by community development officers is the issue of assisting communities in determining their felt-needs and guiding them to execute the process towards solving their felt-needs. Respect for the community's autonomy towards their development must be upheld by the community development workers. By ensuring that local needs are clearly defined, action is taken by the community, and a self-sustaining enterprise is secured, community

development workers should make an effort to take into consideration the collective autonomy of members in community development practices. This will help to inspire other community improvement initiatives. Community based organisations suggest that they are rural or grassroots organisations that are founded, funded, and governed by residents based on their perceived needs. Since most community based organisations are non-profit, independent, and democratically governed organisations whose main goal is to satisfy the social and economic needs of their members, there is need to employ different strategies for the sustenance of such organisations.

Conclusion

The conception this paper stems out of the need for community development programme to be sustainable. In the previous years, some programmes initiated particularly in Nigeria have experienced deterioration and the future programmes are being jeopardized in the sense that instead of building and developing on existing programme due to the inability for them to be sustainable. There is need to allow the idea of autonomy take the place of priority in programme setting. When programmes are initiated by the various developmental agencies, there should be the sense of the autonomous ability of the people which should not be underrated and so that community members would not become nonchalant towards the maintenance of these programme. When programmes take the people into consideration, there is a high level of sustainability and the people will attach much value to their programmes.

This paper prescribes community autonomy as a part of the self-related principles in community development practices. This is essential particularly in the African societies where the community members hold tenaciously to their belief systems in the development of their community. Therefore, most of the programmes that have been established in the various communities are just based on the assumed needs of the people and hence, they lack sustainability. The people themselves are in the right position to point out their felt needs and prioritize their needs.

This paper has shown the value of community sovereignty in actual community development operations. When the principle of autonomy is adopted community projects could have the sense of belonging they deserve.

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