

Afrocentric Approaches to Community Development in the 21st Century

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Edited by

Ndwakhulu Tshishonga
and Eve D. Mafema

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the title of the Book: “Afrocentric Approaches to Community Development in the 21st Century”. Finally, the Editors are grateful to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for all their expert final editorial support and for agreeing to publish this book.

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FOREWORD

African communities have been grappling with development challenges since the advent of Western civilisations on the continent. Western knowledge systems took centre stage for over a century, using a one-size-fits-all approach to address development challenges. Although the approaches were noble, they fail to consider that Africa is a continent with diverse challenges, cultures, and strategies to deal with issues. The one-size-fits-all approach has not enhanced the situation, but rather brought resentment to a certain degree as communities feel undervalued by Western practitioners who tend to impose their cultures when addressing problems. In the colonial era, community development across Africa was adopted as a colonial policy practiced to silence the voices of indigenous people and further expand the colonial rule, especially in rural Africa. This book is a narrated story of the road less travelled in advocating Afrocentric narratives and philosophical perspectives for the advancement of community development scholarship and practice rooted in the African context. It is premised on an Afrocentric agenda and is based on tested philosophies, approaches, and models of Ujamaa, Davha, Harambee, and Ubuntu. These theoretical frameworks and approaches are Afrocentric and demonstrate the possible realities towards the decolonisation of community development in the 21st century and beyond.

Failure to address challenges from an Afrocentric perspective led the book's editors to mobilize other authors to find a way forward using Afrocentric approaches to community development. The book highlights African methods for addressing community issues before Western prescriptions of development. Community development is not a new phenomenon introduced through colonialism and apartheid; it has existed from time immemorial. The book tells a story about Afrocentric approaches that successfully fostered community development. Like a narrative, it details how African philosophies (Ubuntu), idioms, proverbs, and storytelling influenced communities to uplift themselves without over-reliance on outside interventions. Thus, the application of scholarly and pragmatic insight contained in this 28-chapterised edited book, the editors showed their academic stamina to transcend the overly dependent on Western knowledge systems and philosophies.

The book's chapters embody a Sankofaism, tracing the footsteps of community development before Western settlement. The authors contribute intriguing nuances that can be revitalised and applied to tackle community development challenges through traditional strategies long forgotten by society in the 21st century.

Editors of this book are convinced that adopting and employing Afrocentric strategies and approaches for community development can change the way community development scholars and practitioners (e.g., Africans) think about development. This can be done by adapting and integrating what works to respond to community challenges. As most governments in South(ern) Africa and Africa at large are warming towards the idea of institutionalising and professionalizing community development, this book is timely to inform academics, practitioners, policymakers and officials as well as community activists and scholars on the WHAT, WHY and HOW modes operandi.

This book is a clarion call of the African Proverb which says:
"However far the stream flows, it never forgets its sources."

Mr. Peter Netshipale
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ACRONYMS

Community development	CD
Indigenous Knowledge Systems	IKS
Fourth Industrial Revolution	4IR
Indigenous Knowledge	IK
Corporate Social Responsibility	CSR
Sustainable Development	SD
World Commission on Environment and Development	WCED
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development	OECD
Participatory Action Research	PAR
Asset-Based Community Development	ABCD
Sustainable Development Goals	SDG
Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs	COGTA
Appreciative Inquiry	AI
Integrated Community Development	ICD
Theory of Social Capital	TSC
Short Message Service	SMS
Unstructured Supplementary Service Data	USSD
Information and Communication Technology	ICT
Department of Higher Education and Training	DHET
Council on Higher Education	CHE
Service-learning	SL
Community Engagement	CE
Non-Government Organizations	NGO
Southern African Development Community	SADC
United States	US
Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa	BRICS
Corona Virus	COVID-19
Local Economic Development	LED
Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology	UTAUT
Social Employment Fund	SEF
Non profit organisations	NPO
Community Action Networks	CAN
Municipal System Act	MSA
South African Local Government and Traditional Affairs	SALGA
Climate Smart Agriculture	CSA
gross domestic product	GDP

Computer-Aided Learning	CAL
Child-Friendly Education Centre	CFEC
Jindal Institute of Industrial Training	JIIT
Adult Education Training	AET
African Peer Review Mechanism	APRM
Community-Based Tourism	CBT
Presidential Review Commission	PRC
International Association for Community Development	IACD
Focus Group Discussion	FGD

INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS RECLAIMING AFROCENTRIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS

NDWAKHULU TSHISHONGA
AND EVE MAFEMA

Introduction

Community development has varied labels and ontological interpretations attached to it. From time immemorial, indigenous people used community development interventions and practices to craft solutions to their challenges. Garkovich (2011) traces community development from the beginning of human society. Interestingly, such interventions were not only directed at mere economic survival but also embraced political, climate change, social, and cultural values and principles, as well as the environmental and biodiversity aspects, as an integral part of the cosmos. However, during the colonial period, community development was infamous for being an oppressive tool used by colonisers. De Beer (2024) also lamented the abuse of community development as an indoctrinating tool for marginalisation and disempowerment. Community development in developed and developing nations has evolved. Since World W11, community development has been brought into the mainstream with international organisations such as the WB, UNDP, USAID, DFID, and others using it to influence policy development and as an antipoverty strategy, especially in developing nations (Taylor and Mayor, 2008). Mainstreaming of community development saw the use of the concept loosely to pursue the neo-liberal agenda aimed at pacifying the voices of the poor and oppressed in developing nations. However, in the 21st century, social movements and governments are reclaiming community development to enhance the principles of social justice, self-determination, interdependency, sustainability, and collective well-being of ordinary people and communities (Ife, 2016; Ledwith, 2020). Social movements and civil society organisations often offered alternative models and approaches

in their quest for a just and meritocratic society (Brooks, Chikane & Mottiar, 2023). Their interventions were rooted in the long history of community activism and social mobilisation, mainly against hegemonic and oppressive practices. The marketisation of hegemonic and oppressive practices was generated during the colonial and imperial periods (Schutte, 2024). Resisting colonial power was for detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, and social, economic, and cultural imperialism (Davids & Wagghid, 2021; De Beer, 2024; Foucault, 1991). In particular, Amtaika (2017) adds that in Africa, cultural imperialism has contributed to stripping human dignity of the African people. In this regard, the imposition of imperialism and colonialism in the continent saw the erosion of Africa's rich cultural history and heritage under so-called the 'civilising mission' of Africa by European powers (Zahorik & Piknerova, 2018: 1). However, based on local and international mobilisation and solidarity, people centered organisations and movements claim their voice by awakening the power of united communities. These institutions attempted to break away from dependency pathways of community intervention and practices.

Afrocentric Principles of Community Development

Values and principles are the building blocks of community development. Commonly used values and principles entail participation, empowerment, sustainability, equity and equality, social justice, etc (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2024). Participation in this context translates to a radical and transformative agenda for community social change (Ledwith, 2020). Agile participation in indigenous community development is vital in collective decision-making and local participatory development (Dipholo & Tshishonga, 2017). Within traditional societies, participation and empowerment were intertwined with capacity building and people-centred development. Radically, participation was embarked on for individual and collective decision-making aimed at uplifting well-being through community action, problem-solving, social change, and democracy (Kennelley, 2018; Swanepoel & De Beer, 2024). Stoecker (2016: 125), notes that the convergence of these principles should build "people's capacity and knowledge power" to bring about community social change. Imperatively, Chitonga and Mazibuko (2018) envision people's contribution and participation in development to have the potential to build human capacity to realise full human potential. For the public good, traditional leaders act as agents for local democracy, human rights, equity, and social change (Baldwin, 2016; Sekudu, 2019; Tshishonga & Dipholo, 2023). The practice of these principles was activated through the ability of people and leaders'

capabilities, knowledge and skills, hard work and skills (Mpedi, 2023). Community development was advanced in the communal spirit underpinned by Ubuntu and principles of sharing, collaboration, and solidarity towards building self-reliant communities. Ubuntu is grounded in the spirit of communalism, which is based on the communal spirit of collective work, life, and ownership (Asante, 2013, 2020). Indigenously, the world of work was tied to the holistic approach to human life, with social and economic community development as the imperative outcomes. Thus, the call to Africanise is the call to decolonisation of community development from all forms of neo-liberalism, with people's agency as the driving force for development.

For example, the practice of Davha, Ilima, and Letsema was based on the collective use of land and other natural resources as the economic base for indigenous wealth creation. Land and its usage were the common economic resource for the practice of Davha, Ilima, and Letsema (Mpedi, 2023; Mulovhedzi & Luhlima, 2023); Ndou-Mammbona, Moyo, Tshivhase & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2023). Accordingly, although these frameworks are not practised, they help the contemporary cohort of community development academics and practitioners rethink and draw lessons for future theorisation and interventions. At the centre of these frameworks are the ABCD-sensitised communities and their usage of community resources for socio-economic development (Nel, 2020). ABCD was summed by Kretzmann & McKnight in their book titled "Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path toward Finding and Mobilising a Community's Assets: published in 1993. Community capitals and resources are categorised as endogenous assets expressed within physical, financial, economic and social assets (Westoby & Botes, 2020). However, the challenge is how community development can be democratised for social change, active citizenship and interactive governance (Westoby & Botes, 2020). These principles were and are still being used to conceptualise and leverage community development as an integrated, inter-sectoral, and interdisciplinary methodological process (not only to address socio-economic and political challenges), but also to ensure community assets and people's abilities are utilised for their benefit. Thus, liberating community development from its neo-liberal agenda and restoring its status along Afrocentric, social justice, human rights perspectives, and Ubuntu principles would require a radical paradigm shift by stakeholders such as government policymakers, academics, and practitioners.

Towards Reclaiming Afrocentric Pathways

This book adopted an Afrocentric paradigm grounded on African history, culture, experience, knowledge and epistemology (Asante, 1998, 2003, & 2020). Afrocentrism is rooted in the story narration of African peoples' life experiences and life chances from their perspectives (Davis, Williams & Akinyela, 2010; Kershaw, 2004; Shai, 2021). As an inter-sectoral and inter-disciplinary framework, Afrocentrism has the potential to decolonise community development from the enslavement of neo-liberalism and individualism. It awakens African consciousness based on the philosophy of Ubuntu and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), Sonkofa as the epistemological base for theorising community development and its practice (Mosoga, 2020; Nwozaku, 2023; Ramose, 2020). Ubuntu's framing of community development electrifies human agency with solidified principles of solidarity, communalism, sharing, and collaboration as the epistemological and ontological foundation (Zakwe, 2023; Van Breda, 2019). These theoretical and pragmatic frameworks matter in reclaiming community-driven development based on African values and principles. For Schutte (2024), this reclamation demands leveraging Africentricism through decolonisation theory, which emphasises reclaiming autonomy, identity and dignity by the colonised peoples in colonised nations. Thus, the Afro-Ubuntu approaches are grounded in this volume as the proxy for reclaiming and unmuting the oppressed voices crying in the neo-liberal wilderness. The book considers community development as a dynamic and empowering interactive process that embraces technological innovations and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4th IR), which is for community mobilisation and engagement along African values and principles in the 21st Century.

The Significance of this Book Collection

Community development, either as a field of study or a practice, has been in existence since time immemorial. Each region and continent will have its version and practice of what constitutes community development, including how it is practised to address existing challenges. In Africa, especially during the pre-colonial period, community development was used to foster humanity in its socio-economic and environmental totality. In the case of natural climate change-related adversaries such as drought and food insecurity, adapting and preserving the environment were used to mitigate as an integral part of a sustainable environment. For agriculture, produce depended more on rain and soil for practical farming skills and knowledge. In anticipation of such adversaries, the harvest will be stored in barns for

future usage. Integrating social, natural, economic, and environmental resources was key in unlocking the economic base of rural African communities.

In contrast to the pre-colonial environment, the colonial era was infested with community development abuse and manipulation for divide-and-rule and racial discrimination (Alexander, 2013; More, 2017). Community development was used to expand services to underdeveloped regions and communities, especially in the agricultural sector. In the Western and American colonies, community development was often used as an Agricultural extension (De Beer, 2024). Scholars such as Hutchings & Lewis (2020) are critical for community development designed to render life bearable around the edges. Based on the policies of divide-and-rule and separate developments (Westoby & Botes, 2020), community development was institutionalised for the unjust distribution of resources along racial and tribal lines.

The primary purpose of this edited book is to rethink and reflect on the emerging field of community development as both a method and a process for addressing the 21st Century's challenges. The book intends to share insight and scholarship on community development as an emerging field of study within the decolonised and Afrocentric paradigm. Therefore, this book seeks chapters laying out the critical discourse on community development and its varied interpretations. The book has the following objectives: 1) to conceptually understand community development from an Afro-centric paradigm; 2) to trace the historical rise and fall of community development; 3) to document the best community development practices; 4) to showcase the inter-sectoral and inter-disciplinary perspectives on community development; 5) to forge the way forward of community development within the fourth industrial opportunities and demands. The chapters under this collection have critiqued traditional and contemporary models and approaches to community development with the view of forging the Ubuntu-Afrocentric trajectories. The book is relevant to knowledge-hungry students, academics, policymakers, and practitioners in the fields such as government, private, and civil society sectors as well as scholars and researchers working in academic institutions (public and private), especially those in Community Development, Politics, Gender Studies, African Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, Public Administration, Social Work, Development Studies, Development Planning etc.

Content and Structure of the Book

This book is divided into 7 themes. Each theme consists of at least three (3) or four (4) chapters. Theme 1 lays the conceptual foundation for understanding community development from a decolonised and Afrocentric perspective. Theme 2 is unique in its approaches and models underlying community development, such as storytelling, proverbs, Davha, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Theme 3 is grounded on Afro-centric community development principles, embracing indigenous values and principles of Ubuntu. Theme 4 provides insights into Afrocentric community development practices and interventions. Themes 5 and its content chapters rekindle the scholarly interest in socio-economic, political and environmental issues and perspectives. Theme 6 dwells on community leadership and governance with democratic spaces for community development interventions. The last theme provides sector-based case studies, including those on tourism. These themes and their accompanying chapters are the product of community development scholars and practitioners in South Africa and Africa at large.

Chapter 1 by Eve Mafema & Ndwakhulu Tshishonga conceptualises community development as an integrated and pragmatic intervention. Indigenous people and ethnic groups have their vernacular names and connotations attached to community development. Hence, its content and form, as well as the practice of community development, were informed and central to integrating cultural practices, people's spirituality, and social, economic, and political advancement of Indigenous people with care for the environment. Since community development and its practice have been under a liberal-colonial enclave, this chapter reclaims community development by applying Afrocentricity as an alternative approach to dominant Eurocentric perspectives. Viewed from the Afrocentric perspective, this chapter argues that community development was a community affair under the guidance and wisdom of community elders and traditional leaders. Thus, in line with community development, one could argue that Africans are for collectivism, expressed through communalism rather than individualism. The epistemological theorization of community development was not a separate set of actions from its practice; hence, community development was perceived to be holistic to life through cultural heritage. The chapter commences by conceptualizing community and community development from an Afrocentric paradigm. Secondly, community development is traced from the pre-colonial, during colonial and post-colonial-apartheid eras. Thirdly, the foundation is followed by debates on decolonised community development. Fourthly, the chapter frames community development within

the Afrocentric paradigm and its underlying principles. It finally concludes and gives recommendations.

Chapter 2 by Ndwakhulu Tshishonga uses Afrocentrism to theorize community development and forge new developmental pathways. It argues that community development is a collective effort guided by elders and traditional leaders' wisdom, emphasizing communalism over individualism. The epistemological theorisation of community development is seamlessly integrated into its practice, offering a holistic perspective. The chapter begins by conceptualizing the theory of Afrocentricity and then shifts focus to community development from an Afrocentric paradigm. It further explores decolonised community development and frames it within the Afro-Ubuntu philosophy and its core principles before concluding with recommendations.

Chapter 3 by Mmaphuti Mamaleka & Freddy Skobi traces Ubuntu's philosophy by noting a notable dearth of literature on Ubuntu-centred approaches globally, particularly in South Africa. Rooted in African culture, Ubuntu emphasises the importance of humanity and interconnectedness. Historically, communities have adopted Ubuntu principles to address challenges through transparency, tolerance, inclusivity, and harmony, elements that are currently lacking. The prevailing focus on self-enrichment, self-centeredness, and individualism has displaced the Ubuntu ethos, resulting in a deficiency that hinders community development. Thus, this chapter aims to fill this gap by re-examining the approaches and models employed in developing indigenous communities to revive the Ubuntu tradition within these societies. Additionally, it seeks to harmonise these community interventions with the advancements brought about by the 4th Industrial Revolution, considering the current era of digitalisation. The escalating levels of poverty and the persistent rise of social problems require careful consideration. The content of this chapter is derived from secondary data sources, including scholarly books and journal articles. Furthermore, it adopts the social capital theory as its theoretical framework. Sustainable development in communities grappling with challenges like poverty and social ills can be effectively addressed through indigenous community development interventions. The study highlights the significance of incorporating an Ubuntu-centred approach in community development efforts to foster sustainability in the 21st century.

Chapter 4 by Rendani Tshifhumulo grounds people-centered interventions and or approaches consciously adopt people, individuals, communities, and beneficiaries of trusted political systems that respond to their needs and

preferences in human and holistic ways. In governance and development, these approaches are shaped by reactions to corporate capture of the state and new public management and their global influence on public administration. People-centred interventions demand a new relationship between the public service and broader society, characterised by a social contract or philosophy that puts the people's interests first and at the centre of policy implementation. The social contract or philosophy that puts the interests of the people first is central to understanding their needs, their participation in policy formulation and implementation, and the overall development orientations that are critical in building partnerships between state and society to drive transformation. One such social contract or philosophy is Ubuntu, an African term for 'humanness'—for caring and sharing. Ubuntu has values that are concerned with the behaviour and character of a person. It is the opposite of being self-centred and promotes cooperation between individuals, cultures, and nations. Thus, it empowers all to be valued and reach their full potential, following all around them. This chapter critically analyses people-centred interventions from the perspective of Ubuntu. It adopts a qualitative research design and uses secondary sources to analyse. The chapter concludes by reaffirming that Ubuntu is an important philosophy that should be a foundation for development approaches for sustainable community development.

Chapter 5 by Dithlake Kefilwe Johanna presents the decolonisation of the Education and Practice of Community Development. Higher education is conceptualised, designed, and moulded to play a critical role in social transformation by producing graduates who are critically engaging citizens and future leaders in their respective fields and societies. It is, therefore, at the coalface of societal and state reconstruction and development, especially in the global south following post-colonial independence. In the context of South Africa, following the advent of independence in 1994, higher education is faced with the multiple challenges of decolonising, de-racialising, and equalising the academia to reflect the imperatives of transforming the state and society. The chapter argues that community development practitioners and scholars have an important contribution to the decolonisation and transformation of education, curriculum, and practice to advance Indigenous worldviews as a precondition to re-engineer a post-colonial society within the context of a developmental state. A key challenge for community development is the imperative to consciously embrace decolonisation in community development pedagogy, education, and practice for the reconstruction of a post-colonial and post-apartheid society. The bulk of community development theories are predominantly derived from social work and influenced by Western cultures from Western