

Community Service Learning as a New Discourse of Communion of Purpose for the Wellbeing of the Human Person

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Abstract: This study seeks to elucidate that community service ought to have communion of purpose for both the givers and recipients of the services. In communion, community relations run deep because community service is relational and promotes the wellbeing of the community members engaged in the service. Community service can become part of the social-economic system of a country through community service learning. This is a desktop study where secondary data from previous studies and various governments' policies on community service were analyzed. The findings of the study are that indeed community service learning is a value-laden system that does have an input not only on the learners of Community Service but also on the wellbeing of the human person and the society at large. Living and practicing community service makes the members to thrive as it becomes a communal achievement that allows the individual human person to be treated with dignity and honor.

The study recommends Community Service learning to be aligned with sustainable development goals of Kenya to give the learners an experience of communion of purpose when serving the community.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study is necessitated by concerns of little research on sustainable livelihoods and the well-being that we derive from community service as a society in communion. Drawing from the trust we have for the custodians of our resources that has been abused, to lack of justice and the many rising cases of mental distress, our country Kenya is staring at a relative state of discontentment among its citizens.

Kenya is a country that has a strong culture of communion evidenced by the many times the citizens have come together to assist one of their own in a communion of purpose. Communion of purpose in the community is based on issues held in common to deepen the relationship of the community members (Tattersall, 2018). But that is as far as it goes for when it comes to politics, the country is divided right down the middle. This not only creates tension but also births uncertainty of the future which can be a source of anxiety especially in the context of economic and social wellbeing. On the other hand, a community in communion of purpose goes far beyond into their thoughts and feelings which enables them to share or exchange all that they hold dear with other members of the community (Páez and Rimé, 2014).

But community life itself can become a source of tension. Many communities appear as patched up unrelated parts (Cantle,

2018). In several communities, there is apparent cordiality, which rarely includes a deep, sincere, trusting, and warm relationship among the members. Over-involvement in work, forces the members to avoid sharing in community responsibilities and being accountable to others in the community. We keep ourselves simply busy. Ministry becomes an excuse for not meeting others meaningfully. It is extremely important to build communion in communities and each member must strive to live in the spirit of communion as a community service. This eliminates nasty judgments, unjust criticism, calculated coldness, and subtle manoeuvres, and promotes genuine, humble, and positive communion.

II. COMMUNION

In the context of this study, communion refers to the condition of being part of a larger social entity and it is manifested in strivings of union and solidarity with that larger entity (Wiggins, 1991; Kosche, 2021). The importance of communion is demonstrated in associations with relationships that influence not only the individuals but also the society as it improves the interpersonal relationships (Martin and Dawson, 2009; Kosche, 2021). Communion from a social context focuses on involvement with others (Abele, Ellemers, Fiske, Koch and Yzerbyt, 2021)). Communion allows members of a community to connect as they strive to survive and thrive (Chan, Wang and Ybarra, 2019). This depends mainly on the motive of communion, love, understanding, connectedness and trust, wealth, influence, and power (Abele and Wojciszke, 2019). Communion as a value forms the human existence establishing the social life with respect to self and with respect to others (Lauck, 2021). For instance, if a person does not closely consider the needs of others, it will impact not only the others but also the individuals and will not lead to a good human existence and communion. This is because communion promotes warmth and morality (Hauke and Abele, 2020). Communion is related to social relations and cognition (Abele and Wojciszke, 2014). The author further notes communion focuses on the integration of an individual into a larger social entity and onto social integrations which expand the dimensions of social judgement. Communion promotes the qualities relevant for the establishment and maintenance of social relationships such as being fair (Hauke and Abele, 2020).

Community Service

Community service is work done by an individual or a group of people for the good of others often within the community they live in with no direct personal returns. Community service teaches one the art of participation in the lives of others and promotes the ownership of problem-solving activities and projects (Jimenez, Anyon, Clark and Kennedy, 2022). Community service enhances community capacity and sustainability of activities that increase the members participation in decision-making which encourages them to own the process of any initiative or project that improves on their livelihoods (Moayerian, McGehee and Stephenson Jr, 2022). Community service is voluntary, but many organizations today are looking into it as a requirement for workers to get promotion and students are required of it as part of their curriculum. This does not convey the nature of service that is relational based, but one might do it for the benefits especially where one may derive from the service (Pence and Kaiser, 2022). Community service may serve as a guide for humanistic management which may help establish community good and the realization of personal good which would yield a community with a purpose (Frémeaux and Michelson, 2017).

Using intermediate activities may fulfill value-bearing participation that provides opportunities for community service (Tasioulas, 2020). The advantage of this can be viewed in terms of its rationale for serving one's community and the possibility of one to become an active member of the communion of purpose in community service to overcome social problems such as poverty and poor policy making that often confront the community (Henderson, Brown and Pancer, 2012). Community service is also positively correlated with identity integration of the members as well as their life satisfaction (Ji, Chui, Ni and Dong, 2019).

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Doering-White, Sanchez and Creasey, (2021), community service can be seen as a community practice of doing things. Community practice is the application of skills to alter the behavior patterns of community, its members, members relationships and interactions (Umanailo, 2019).

Repeated service to a community by a member becomes a practice for all members as it provides opportunities for members empowerment. It builds capacity for members to access and manage community resources and workforce. This establishes a means of reciprocity which improves the welfare of the community members. This causes a social change that embraces practices and values that promote the wellbeing of the community members (Herzberg, 2013). Herzberg (2013) further notes when efforts of community service are not structured to raise the social issues that result in the social problems and resolve them which can result in social change and community transition, then any other service is charity.

It is imperative to note that communities are different with differing challenges that push the people to participate in community service though the commitment level may differ

from one person to another (Yero, Othman, Samah, D'Silva and Sulaiman, 2012). This may make it difficult or even impossible to harmonize the general understanding of support factors towards community service.

Thus, it is important to note that community service encourages openness and inclusion of members through meetings and consensus which allows the much-needed push for the people to get engaged in the push and drive to foster greater understanding among the members for a better community and a good life as a result of community intervention (Palmiotto, 2011; Caputo and Tomai, 2020). Community service is sustainable through integrative development of comprehensive practices and policies that improve the commitment to community service practices (Greenfield, Black and Pestine, 2022).

Community Service as a Social Capital

Social capital is social organization with such features as networks, norms and trust that facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit of a community. It further improves the value of benefits of investment in human capital which carries important practical and policy related implications in a community (Putman, 1993; Nah, Namkoong, Chen, and Hustedde, 2016).

To prosper as a community, there is need to restore the fabric of the community (Block, 2018). This requires a network of members to engage in activities for the good of their community as it facilitates coordination and communication and amplifies information of trustworthiness among individuals (Putman, 1993). Working together is much easier if there is substantial stock of social capital (Ghahtarani, Sheikhmohammady and Rostami, 2020).

When activities are embedded in networks of social interaction, there is incentives and opportunities for community service with a communion of purpose and subterfuge is greatly reduced. Network of community service engagement embodies success such as social capital which can serve as a cultural framework for the communion of purpose which may make it possible for the community members to address new problems through their collective action and interpersonal trust (Andrews, 2012). Social capital improves on the engagements of community service as it is characterized by the contributions of the community members to the communion of purpose as seen in the community organizational life, community volunteerism, informal sociability, and social trust (Andrews, 2012; Williams and Menestrel, 2013). Social trust extends the radius of humanity and widens their view of fair, helpful and trustworthy (Putman, 2000; Lee and Jung, 2018). This is especially useful for a community when faced with a need or a problem not adequately addressed by government or the private sector for they can trust each other to seek a solution and resolve the problem (Hall, 2006; Mazzucato, Kattel and Ryan-Collins, 2020). This is because social capital not only builds but also improves social networks, norms of reciprocity and bonds of trust that develop between community members which promotes the communion of purpose on problem solving (Polson, Kim, Jang, Johnson and Smith, 2013).

Development of Communion in a Community

According to Plato's philosophy, communion is revolutionary with dialogue and logic of propositions which is formulated not on knowledge alone but on acquaintance (Hamlyn, 1955). Communion is a continuous state of connectedness from the existence of communications link originating from vocal relationships (Locke, 2001; Billard, 2022).

Communion is growing in the world because it seems to close the difficulty of non-inclusion of one who is different or other (Bruni and Héjji, 2011). Communion can be a means of developing civic communion where with reaffirmation of once community identity the individual can belong by virtue of their acceptance of the community's values and beliefs. Civic communion is where communicative and performative community activities draw people into a shared vision for the community that promotes a shared identity and code of conduct (Smith, 2022). Civic communion promotes community interaction that performs the role of civic bonding of the community members around social and political structures of the specific locality (Milofsky, 2019). This communion offers community development participants a pragmatic vehicle for construction and maintenance of community (Ledwith and Springett, 2022). This strengthens communities and acts as a form of empowerment for the members.

Civic communion is a fundamental unit of social organization that brings the members into the economic and cultural mainstream through the development of new communication networks (Pavarala and Malik, 2021)). Communion in a community is important as it not only empowers the members but enables the creation of policies and programs that provide direction for local actions aimed at building stronger and healthier communities.

Communion in a community makes members become increasingly reliant on extra-local institutions and source of income and mitigates the community from extra-local groups, organizations and businesses who pursue their interest with little concern of how their actions will affect the members of the community.

This affects the local ties that once connected the community as they begin to break down overtime. This diminishes the importance of communion in a community and local relationships among the members.

Strengthening Community with Communion Relations

According to St Thomas of Aquinas, it is possible for people to communicate with each other for the common reality among that which is already in existence (Giacchetti, 2021). Strong community relations enhance community members' participation (Plaskoff, 2012).

This not only improves the democratic process of the members to raise critical issues but establishes systems and structures of decision-making processes and accountability (Raco and Flint, 2001; Peruzzotti, 2012; Dzur, 2018). This is exemplified by such initiatives as community assemblies and public participation in community planning (Trunk, Birkel &

Hartmann, 2020; Dzur & Hendriks, 2018). This encourages the members of the community to mobilize themselves and take on active roles in the ways of governing the community (Guta, Flicker & Roche, 2013).

When a community decides to identify, affirm and celebrate its norms it has to decipher its cultural context and, in the process, make strategies that best work out for the growth and development of the community (Aaron, 2012). This improves relationships and interaction as members get more integrated into community service and those who were disparaged get valued by fellow members. Developing communion relations in community service also serves as a means of dialogue and hospitality which shapes the practice of contemporary concerns of economic, social, political, cultural, and ecological context (Westoby & Dowling, 2013).

Dignity of the Human Person in Community Service

Human dignity is a particular cultural understanding of the inner moral worth of the human person and has proper relations with the society (Howardi, 1995; Killmister, 2017). Dignity is incorporated into the community as a concomitant of one's ascribed status or is earned during one's life when adhered to the society's values, customs and norms.

The dignity of the human person in community service creates its communal source which mitigates social harm that accompany dignity relations (Killmaster, 2017). This makes the community a source of social dignity where each member is respected. Dignity is a fundamental value in the process of humanizing communities' cultures and relationships (Pless, Maak & Harris, 2017). Dignity in community service promotes the value of the good of the members. For instance, helping a less advantaged person without unnecessarily reminding them of their dire situation or making derogatory remarks to them that would make them feel worthless (Metz, 2012). Metz (2012) further notes that the communitarian concept of dignity is more appropriate because it is natural and plausibly uncontroversial about the human worth.

The human dignity as a communitarian concept is more meaningful as each member owns the process compared to the life-based concept where the dignity is inherent in one's capacity to be autonomous (Barkin & Sánchez, 2020). Communion in community service assembles community members to take advantage of underutilized resources and peoples' energies for improving their ability to raise living standards and assure restoration of their community well-being and their social worth (Divjak, 2018). Communitarianism helps coordinate activities, share information and build alliances among different communities sharing the same ideology thus accelerating the dynamism of community service (Mofuoa, 2012). Eventually, this leads to the possibility of economic, political, social and ecological transformation (Barkin & Sánchez, 2020).

Community Service Learning

Community service learning is a value-laden system that reflect the culture and priorities of each region where it is undertaken and as such theoretically speaking, we serve so that we may

learn (Furco and Norvel, 2019). Community service learning is a type of experiential learning that allows a learner to have concrete experience, reflect on the experience and form new ideas by allowing the learner to use the experience to analyze, synthesize and evaluate the outcome of the lesson learnt in service to others (Cooper, 2013).

Community service in a community by individuals is not inherent but learnt. Community service learning is a co-curricular activity that students engage in as an addition to their academic activities (Rutledge and LeMire, 2020). It is seen as a means of reviving apathetic citizens through the civic education transformation (Muleya, 2015).

Community service learning combines learning and community service in ways that enhance students' growth and common good (Warren, 2012). It is a pedagogy that combines academic and educational experience by creating collaboration between school, community, and work (Deeley, 2010). Students can take it in their academic year with one semester assigned to it or one day every week or one week in a month after class. It all depends on the curriculum of the academic institute. The stages also depend, whether the students are in junior or senior school, college or university and is graded to ensure the learners partake of the exercise in their study life.

Community service learning integrates meaningful instructions and reflection on community service to enrich learning experience that ultimately strengthens the communities (Bandy, 2016). This promotes civic responsibility and improves on the well-being of the participating students. Civic responsibility is an important element of democratic and social participation (Saleem, Iqbal, Ali & Rizvi, 2021). It is a problem-solving based model that introduces students as consultants in the community. They work with community members to understand a community's problems or needs. For example, business class students can solve a problem by developing a website for a small business in their community which may not only boost the business but gives the students a feeling of accomplishment and a sense of belonging and wanting to do more for the community.

Research studies have found that students who are involved in service-learning increases their commitment to civic participation. Students end up valuing their participation in community service activities and are convinced their contribution is towards larger development of the people. This not only increases their sense of association with people in the community but also increases their awareness and relational good in the community (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Thomas, 2021).

Many countries in Europe, Asia have introduced service learning in their learning institutions. Countries such as South Africa and United States of America have boards that oversee its running. In Europe they have the European Service-Learning Association that was established in 2003 (Sotolino-Losada, Arbués-Radigales, García-Docampo & González-Geraldo, 2021).

Community Service and the Wellbeing of the Human Person

It is pertinent to note that in this study communion of purpose in community service makes it sustainable as it makes the intention known. From the very onset it is clear to every member of the community the importance of the social worth of the human person. Upholding of the social worth is used to measure a society's social achievement. This becomes a sort of greatness that is used to measure the value a community places on its citizens. As such communal achievement in a community is only possible in an environment where the human person is treated with honor and nobility as their dignity is upheld (Agulanna, 2013).

Community service promote equality and studies have shown that those societies that strive for greater equality have more levels of common good (Woolcock, 2019). This improves on the levels of mental health, experience less violence and criminality with better social and health outcomes (Roffey, 2013). The well-being of the human person in these communities is upheld in such values as self-worth and personal growth. It also generates social determination, caring and compassion in the community. This increases accountability and responsiveness making democratic participation possible (Cloutier, Ehlenz & Afinowich, 2019). The ultimate benefit of this is respect for human diversity that generates responsible community members who support community structures and members feel obliged to uphold social justice and thus social contentment (Agulanna, 2013).

IV. CONCLUSION

The study finds that Community Service learning if well-structured and its enforcement and implementation is overseen by an established authority as is in Europe, U.S.A and South Africa, it will transform a community and promote the growth of social capital. This is because Community Service is a value-laden system that does have an input not only on the learners of Community Service but also on the wellbeing of the human person in the community and the country at large. Living and practicing Community Service makes the members to thrive as it becomes a communal achievement that allows the individual human person to be treated with dignity and honor.

The study concludes that indeed there is a lot of good in Community Service which can be promoted through service learning. When introduced in institutions of learning, this develops school communities where relationships are core, and a sense of belonging is fostered for all especially the marginalized or those excluded from participating, who finally find a path of inclusion.

According to this study Community Service learning may promote increased civic engagement among students as well as enhance the welfare of the community served by the students. Community Service learning strengthens the experience of learners with knowledge, comprehension of the community members environment and increases the students' sensitivity to the needs of those that they serve in the community.

The study recommends the Community Service learning to be aligned with sustainable development goals of the country as

this will give the learners and the members of the community the experience of communion of purpose in serving the community.

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