



Autonomy as a Fundamental Principle of the Identity of the Autonomous Community Action Movement in Africa

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Abstract: The autonomy of community action in Africa is a complex subject of study, encompassing political, social, economic and cultural dimensions. Within this framework, the autonomous community action movement plays a key role in the governance and identity of communities. The central issue lies in the ability of local communities to exercise their autonomy in the face of the constraints of governmental and international agendas. How does this autonomy manifest itself and what are the limits and challenges that accompany it? The research question is: How can the autonomy of community action in Africa be strengthened in the face of financial challenges and political pressures while preserving the local identity and knowledge of communities? The study is based on the qualitative analysis of different areas of autonomy. It examines concrete cases, such as rural women's associations and agricultural cooperatives, to illustrate the implementation of autonomous strategies within African communities. In relation to the results and discussion, local communities have developed independent priorities, supported by trade unions and citizens' associations, promoting participatory governance. The creation of community structures that meet local needs have strengthened social cohesion and the valorization of knowledge. Economic autonomy is illustrated by local initiatives such as cooperatives and microfinance that reduce external financial dependence, such as agricultural cooperatives in Cameroon. Cultural autonomy helps to preserve local traditions and knowledge, while adapting to modern changes, strengthening collective identity.

However, challenges remain, such as external financial dependence and political pressures, including restrictive laws that perceive autonomy as a challenge to the state. This study demonstrates that the autonomy of community action is essential to strengthen the identity and governance of communities in Africa. Yet, for it to be truly effective, it is crucial to mitigate the challenges these initiatives face. Future prospects include building local capacity, encouraging equitable partnerships with governments, and the importance of a policy environment that supports community autonomy.

Keywords: Community action, autonomy, self-management, social cohesion, cultural identity;



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INTRODUCTION

Autonomous community action is based on autonomy as the founding principle of its identity. It goes beyond simple administrative independence to embody the ability of communities to define their own priorities, strategies and values. In a context of social transformations and institutional pressures, community autonomy became a strategic issue, guaranteeing internal coherence, citizen participation and the legitimacy of the movement. In Africa, this notion of community autonomy has been asserted in a context marked by economic crises, structural adjustment and dependence on

international donors. The demands of communities for several decades have been part of a broader dynamic of building citizenship and consolidating participatory democracy (Olukoshi, 2002; Sow, 2005). Community-based organizations were weakened in the 1980s with the imposition of structural adjustment programs by international financial institutions, which required the conformity of technocratic management models with conditional financing, thus reducing the autonomy of community organizations (Olukoshi, 2002). As Jean-Marc Ela (1994) points out, "African villages cannot be content to be the receptacles of policies from above, they must invent their own paths of development". This statement reflects the tension between the desire of local communities to preserve their autonomy and the pressure exerted by states and donors.

Despite its role as an actor in social transformation, autonomous community action refers to the ability of communities to define their priorities outside the constraints imposed by state institutions or external donors. In a context marked by globalization, rising inequalities and the increasing complexity of the relationship between civil society and public authorities, autonomy is becoming an identity and strategic issue. It allows community organizations to maintain their internal coherence, strengthen citizen participation and promote forms of local governance based on solidarity and self-organization.

This article proposes to examine community autonomy not only as an organizational principle, but as a constitutive element of the identity of the autonomous community action movement. The aim is to show how this principle structures practices, legitimizes demands and ensures the sustainability of the movement in the face of institutional pressures and social changes. In this sense, autonomy appears to be an essential condition for understanding the specificity and vitality of autonomous community action in the field of social and political sciences.

1- PRINCIPLE OF COMMUNITY AUTONOMY IN AFRICA

1-1- History of the principle of community autonomy in Africa

The principle of community autonomy in Africa has been built gradually, from traditional societies, anti-colonial struggles, post-independence policies to community development policies after independence (1960s). The main authors who have studied this process are:

- Cheikh Anta Diop (1954, 1960), and other African intellectuals have spoken out from the beginning of the anti-colonial movements in relation to the recognition of community structures as a basis for governance. This demonstrates the importance of traditional community structures in African historical continuity;
- Joseph Ki-Zerbo (1972, 1992): he insists on the fact that the development of Africa will be done by Africa itself and its different communities. This is why African states sought to reconcile centralization and community autonomy, which led to the establishment of community village experiments;
- Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah (1960–70), both theoreticians of Ujamaa (African socialism) and promoters of African communitarianism, based their vision on the creation of a model of autonomous community villages. The new African states sought to reconcile state centralization with community autonomy because of the colonists' spirit of centralization of power, which led to the establishment of rural and community development programs. Julius Nyerere (1968): *"Ujamaa is the political translation of the African extended family, applied to national development."*;
- Yao Assogba (2008) believes that population dynamics and local autonomy must be principles in development policies with regard to the rise of NGOs and participatory development. In this context, local governance and participatory democracy must be considered as priorities;
- Alain Marie (2007), analysis of the African paradoxes between individualism and communitarianism which will be able to consolidate the concept in the African social sciences, which will emphasize local governance, decentralization and citizen participation

In Africa, the autonomy of community action has been asserted through local initiatives carried out by the populations themselves, often in response to social, economic and political crises. Studies on associative movements in Africa show that this principle is at the heart of the construction of active citizenship and development based on community solidarity. If there is one principle that has run through the history of community movements in Africa for several decades, it is that of the autonomy of collective actions. Long before the formalization of modern approaches to community action, this principle was already at the heart of local initiatives in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods where villages facing poverty and exclusion had to come together to find ways of survival and protection. This African socialism will allow the strengthening of the creation of community structures directly controlled by the inhabitants: agricultural cooperatives, health mutuals, rural women's associations, self-help groups for the education of children, or even solidarity microfinance programs.

These initiatives reflect a conception of service which, in contrast to the often centralised state mechanisms, is based on citizen involvement and the ability of communities to invent their own solutions. The African community movement, in conjunction with women's and youth organizations, is thus developing a practice based on the principles of autonomous and militant action, but also on the representation of the needs of communities within the framework of a **local participatory democracy**.

In the 1980s to 1990s, in the face of economic crises and structural adjustments imposed by international institutions, a new generation of African community-based organizations emerged. They have tackled major social issues: **public health, education, the fight against poverty, women's empowerment, child protection, and the fight against domestic violence**. This dual movement in search of community autonomy and the search for partners by states to reduce the costs of public services has given local organizations an **unprecedented balance of power**, allowing them to claim their own identity and approaches.

Today, programs such as the Community Empowerment Program (PAC) in Côte d'Ivoire, coordinated by Dr. Oula Inka Ange, illustrate this dynamic: putting African solidarity back at the center of public policies and making populations the real actors of their own like ICGs and cooperatives.

1-2- Problem of the study

The problem that can be identified from our study concerns the question of the autonomy of community action in Africa in the face of multiple challenges. Indeed, the text raises the political, social, economic and cultural aspects of this autonomy, while highlighting the essential role of community autonomy in the governance, identity and social legitimacy of communities. However, he also mentions the limits and challenges that this autonomy faces, particularly with regard to external financial dependence and political pressures.

Thus, the research question is: How can the autonomy of community action in Africa be strengthened in the face of financial challenges and political pressures while preserving the local identity and knowledge of communities?

2- COMMUNITY AUTONOMY AS A DEMAND IN AFRICA

2-1- Definition and quest for community autonomy

Community autonomy refers to the ability of a community to manage its own affairs, make collective decisions and mobilize its resources without over-reliance on a central government.

2-1-1- Definition of the concept

To better understand the contours of this group of words, we will call on several authors:

- According to Larousse (2009): community autonomy is "a situation of a collectivity, a public body endowed with powers and institutions allowing it to manage its own affairs without interference from the central government";

- Community autonomy is a pillar of decentralization, allowing for resource management and the strengthening of participatory democracy by local communities (Balakiyém, 2023);
- **Ibrahima Touré (2012):** for his part, links community autonomy to self-management and local democratic practices, emphasizing citizen participation and local governance.

2-1-2- Quest for community autonomy

The dynamic of empowerment and legitimization of African community organizations is frequently hampered by the political and economic orientations defined by States and international bodies. The introduction of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s, under the aegis of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, was a major turning point: these mechanisms forced local associations to redefine their organisational practices. As a result, many of them have had to restrict their autonomy in order to align themselves with technocratic management models and to meet the requirements of conditional financing (Olukoshi, 2002).

Jean-Marc Ela (1994) recalled that "African villages cannot be content to be the receptacles of policies from above, they must invent their own paths of development". Similarly, **Fatou Sow** (2005) already pointed out that women's movements in Africa demand real autonomy, which is an essential condition for community-based organizations to define their priorities and free themselves from donor dependence.

From a participatory governance perspective, several African community coalitions have sought to counter the tendency to reduce local associations to the role of simple relays of public policies or international NGOs. They have thus instituted principles of action aimed at strengthening community empowerment and the endogenous management of social needs. These principles are based on:

- The identification of problems by the communities themselves, which promotes a contextualized reading and local ownership of the issues;
- The definition of projects by local actors, guaranteeing coherence between the initiatives and the socio-economic realities experienced;
- Associative management and the direct involvement of residents, which consolidate social capital and establish horizontal, inclusive and sustainable governance.

These guidelines are in line with the reflections of Oula Inka Ange in Côte d'Ivoire, who emphasizes that community empowerment is a sine qua non condition for the sustainability of local initiatives. In this sense, sustainability is not limited to the continuity of projects, but is anchored in the ability of communities to generate and maintain collective dynamics independent of external injunctions

The major citizen mobilizations took place in various African countries (Senegal, Burkina Faso, South Africa) in the 1990s and 2000s, thus reaffirming the need for states to **respect the freedom of orientation and practices of community organizations**. These demands have sometimes led to the adoption of national policies for the recognition of civil society, as in Mali with the *National Policy for the Development of Civil Society* (2005), which explicitly recognizes the autonomous role of associations in the exercise of citizenship and social development.

The principle of autonomy is thus recognized as a **crucial issue** for African organizations and for governments. It is associated with a critical distance necessary between community movements and the state, in order to establish a dynamic relationship in which communities protect their identity and retain room for manoeuvre in their relations with the public authorities (Olukoshi, 2002; Sow, 2005).

Since then, the recognition of autonomy has remained at the heart of the demands of African community organizations, as well as the demands for better financial support. At pan-African forums on civil society, such as those organized by the **Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)**, community actors have adopted resolutions aimed at

strengthening reflection on the autonomous nature of their organizations, in relation to the criteria of citizen participation and democratic governance.

2-2- Demands and community mobilizations

Community demands and mobilizations in Africa have their roots in a long history of resistance to forms of political, economic and cultural domination. Since the 1980s, the imposition of structural adjustment programmes by international financial institutions has profoundly transformed local dynamics, reducing the autonomy of associations and forcing them to conform to technocratic management models. Faced with this structural dependence, communities have developed mobilization strategies aimed at reaffirming their capacity for action and defending their own interests.

These mobilizations are not limited to a contestation of public policies or international injunctions; They are also part of a logic of building social capital, strengthening community empowerment and promoting participatory governance. They reflect the willingness of local populations to take ownership of decision-making processes, to define their own priorities and to guarantee the sustainability of collective initiatives. Thus, community demands appear as spaces for negotiation between external constraints and endogenous aspirations, where the recognition of local autonomy and the legitimacy of alternative social practices are at stake

In several African countries, citizen mobilizations have emerged to defend the autonomy of community organizations:

- Senegal: the Y'en a marre movement and urban neighborhood associations denounced the instrumentalization of organizations by the state and demanded autonomy based on citizen participation;
- Mali: the adoption in 2005 of the National Policy for the Development of Civil Society explicitly recognizes the autonomous role of associations in the exercise of citizenship and social development (CODESRIA, 2005);
- Cameroon: agricultural cooperatives and farmers' associations have asserted their autonomy in the management of local resources, refusing to be reduced to simple implementers of state programs or NGOs (Ela, 1994);
- Côte d'Ivoire: The Community Empowerment Program (CAP), coordinated by Dr. Oula Inka Ange, illustrates the desire to put African solidarity back at the center of public policies;
- South Africa: Post-apartheid community movements demanded strong autonomy in housing and education, demanding that the state respect their freedom of action.

2-3- Institutional recognition of community autonomy

This recognition of autonomy is associated with a critical distance needed between community movements and the state, in order to preserve a dynamic relationship where communities protect their identity and retain room for manoeuvre (Olukoshi, 2002; Sow, 2005).

However, this autonomy remains fragile in the face of financial dependence, political pressures and the difficulty of reconciling citizen participation and institutional requirements. Pan-African forums organized by CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) have regularly reaffirmed the need to strengthen reflection on the autonomous nature of organizations, in connection with the criteria of democratic governance and citizen participation.

3- A WEAKENED AUTONOMY IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

3-1- Fragility of community autonomy

The principle of autonomy, although central to African community movements, remains difficult to apply on the ground. The commitments and declarations of community organizations in favor of this autonomy often come up against the harsh reality of funding and institutional constraints. Can

we really preserve full autonomy when the majority of resources come from projects financed by the State or by international donors, as is the case for many African associations?

The question of preserving full autonomy within the framework of African associations financed mainly by the State or by international donors refers to a structural tension between financial dependence and the capacity for self-determination. On the theoretical level, several works in the social sciences (dependency theory, sociology of organizations, studies on participatory governance) show that organizational autonomy is difficult to reconcile with a strong dependence on external resources.

Indeed, when funding comes from state or international sources, it is usually accompanied by normative and technocratic conditions that guide the priorities, management methods and objectives of associations. This situation limits the room for manoeuvre of local actors and tends to transform community organizations into agents of implementation of public policies or international agendas, rather than real spaces of endogenous mobilization.

However, this analysis should be qualified. Autonomy should not be seen only as absolute financial independence, but also as a capacity for negotiation and reappropriation of resources. Some associations manage to maintain a form of relative autonomy by adapting external funding to their own priorities, diversifying their sources of support, or mobilizing social and community capital to reduce their vulnerability to dependency.

Thus, the preservation of full autonomy seems theoretically unlikely in a context of almost exclusive dependence on external funding. However, relative and strategic autonomy remains possible, provided that associations develop mechanisms for participatory governance, diversification of resources and strengthening of their community legitimacy

With insufficient and unstable public or international funding, African community-based organizations have regularly faced difficulties in maintaining their mission in full without obtaining external funding. This dilemma is widely documented in works on African civil society (Olukoshi, 2002; CODESRIA, 2005).

As **Jean-Marc Ela** (1994) has shown, village and peasant associations are often reduced to implementing programmes designed by the state or donors, to the detriment of their role in social transformation. The State, which is more interested in the services offered (health, education, microfinance) than in political actions aimed at attacking the structural causes of poverty, tends to limit the critical scope of action of community-based organizations.

In addition, international donors and some African municipalities impose financing conditions that undermine organizational autonomy. In some cases, local authorities demand a seat on the board of directors or a right to oversee the internal management of associations, going so far as to ask for the resignation of officials deemed too critical. These practices of interference are reminiscent of the tensions noted by **Fatou Sow** (2005), who emphasizes that women's movements in West Africa must constantly defend their autonomy in the face of attempts at political and institutional recuperation.

Accountability requirements have also multiplied, often oriented towards quantitative indicators (number of beneficiaries, service statistics) rather than qualitative indicators (social impact, citizen participation). In some cases, civil servants or donors have even suggested limiting access to the decision-making bodies of associations for people experiencing poverty, which goes against the principles of inclusion and participatory democracy defended by African community movements (Ela, 1994; Sow, 2005).

3-2- Research Methodology

This study will adopt a qualitative approach based on a descriptive and comparative analysis of autonomous community actions in Africa. The political, social, economic and cultural axes of autonomy will be examined through case studies, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis.

- **Case studies** : We will select several representative examples of autonomous community action movements in different African countries. Each case will be analysed according to the defined axes, highlighting the specific dynamics and local contexts.
- **Semi-structured interviews** : We will conduct interviews with key actors in community movements, such as association leaders, union members, cooperative leaders, and representatives of local authorities. These interviews will allow us to collect testimonies and perceptions on the challenges and successes related to autonomy.
- **Literature review** : A careful review of relevant documents (reports, publications, academic articles, etc.) will be conducted to complement the empirical evidence collected. This will include research on public policy, regulatory frameworks, and previous studies related to community autonomy.
- **Thematic analysis** : We will conduct a thematic analysis of the data collected in order to identify trends, issues and relationships between the different axes of autonomy. This analysis will also highlight the limitations and challenges encountered by autonomous community initiatives, while respecting the socio-cultural context of the communities studied.

This methodology will aim not only to understand the autonomy of community action in Africa, but also to identify its implications for the identity and governance of local communities.

Thus, maintaining full autonomy in a context of underfunding and dependence on donors remains a perilous exercise for African community-based organizations. As **Oula Inka Ange** reminds us in her work on community empowerment in Côte d'Ivoire, only local governance based on solidarity and citizen participation can guarantee the sustainability and independence of initiatives.

Table 1: Example of the application of the Rural Women's Association in Cameroon

This table presents an analysis of the autonomy of an association through different dimensions, each containing criteria and indicators evaluated by a score of 1 to 5.

Dimension	Criteria	Observed indicators	Score (1–5)	Comments
Policy	Critical distance from the state	The association defines its projects without direct directives from the ministry, but depends on local authorisations.	3	Partial autonomy: freedom of orientation, but strong administrative constraints.
Economical	Financial independence	40% local funding (subscriptions, sale of agricultural products), 60% NGO dependency.	2	Fragile autonomy: dependence on donors for the survival of projects.
Social	Inclusive citizen participation	Strong involvement of women, young people and vulnerable people in decision-making. Regular meetings.	4	Assertive self-sufficiency: participatory and inclusive governance.
Cultural	Valorization of endogenous knowledge	Use of local languages, integration of traditional agricultural knowledge into projects.	5	Strong cultural autonomy: local identity preserved and valued.
Organizational	Autonomous associative governance	Rotation of responsibilities, financial transparency, training of members.	4	Good internal governance, but lack of resources to strengthen management.

Overall results: Average scores : $(3 + 2 + 4 + 5 + 4) \div 5 = 3.6 / 5$

Interpretation of Table 1.

The interpretation of this table reveals to us:

- For the political dimension: there is a critical distance from the state, because autonomy has a score of 3 which illustrates partial autonomy. The association has the ability to define its projects without direct directives from the ministry, which indicates a certain freedom of action. However, this autonomy is limited by the need to obtain local permits, which creates administrative constraints. This score reflects a balance between autonomy and constraints, suggesting that the association must navigate a restrictive regulatory environment;
- For the economic dimension, there is financial independence, which leads to a fragile autonomy. The association's funding is mainly based on external sources, with 60% coming from NGOs. This highlights a dependence that compromises the stability and sustainability of its projects. This situation indicates significant economic vulnerability and requires a strategy to diversify sources of financing and strengthen financial autonomy;
- For the social dimension, we have inclusive citizen participation, including assertive social autonomy, which is a principle of community autonomy. The association demonstrates a strong involvement of women, young people and vulnerable people in its decision-making processes. Holding regular meetings promotes participatory governance. This high score reflects a significant commitment to internal democracy and social inclusion, which is crucial for building a strong foundation of community support;
- The cultural dimension advocates the valorization of endogenous knowledge, hence a strong cultural autonomy. The promotion of local knowledge and the use of traditional languages show that the association strengthens cultural identity and preserves inherited knowledge. This maximum score underlines the importance given to local identity, and suggests that the association plays a major role in safeguarding and promoting its culture;
- The organizational dimension shows us an autonomous associative governance with good internal governance. Rotation of responsibilities and financial transparency are signs of good governance, which strengthens the credibility of the association. However, the lack of resources to support and improve these practices remains an obstacle. This score indicates a healthy structure, but highlights the need for investment to support and strengthen association management.

The association displays a notable autonomy in the social and cultural dimensions, demonstrating a strong commitment to the participation of members and the enhancement of local knowledge. However, it faces significant challenges with regard to its financial and political autonomy, illustrating a need to improve its financial resources and navigate administrative constraints. Particular attention to these aspects could contribute to greater autonomy and sustainability of the projects carried out by the association.

3-3-Operational Action Plan to Strengthen Community Self-Reliance

Table 2: Suggested Community Autonomy Plan

Dimension	Criteria	Observed indicators	Score (1–5)	Comments
Policy	Consolidating the critical distance from the State	- Train members in active citizenship- Build regional coalitions- Produce advocacy reports	- Number of trainings completed- Number of coalitions created- Reports produced and disseminated	Short-term (1–2 years)
Economical	Diversifying and securing financing	- Develop income-generating activities- Set up a system of internal contributions- Forge local partnerships	- % of local vs. external funding- Amount of revenue generated- Number of partnerships signed	Medium term (2–3 years)

Social	Strengthening inclusive citizen participation	- Ensure the presence of women and young people in the bodies- Organize community assemblies- Promote transparency	- % of women/youth on the Board- Number of meetings held- Accountability reports published	Short-term (1–2 years)
Cultural	Valuing endogenous knowledge and practices	- Use local languages- Integrate traditional knowledge into projects- Promote cultural values	- % of activities in local languages- Number of projects incorporating traditional knowledge- Cultural activities organised	Medium term (2–3 years)
Organizational	Improving associative governance	- Set up a rotation of responsibilities- Train members in association management- Develop participatory monitoring tools	- Job turnover rate- Number of training courses carried out- Monitoring tools adopted	Long-term (3–5 years)

This table presents a suggested plan for the strengthening of community autonomy which also proposes a framework for evaluating the performance of an organization or a project through different dimensions: Political, Economic, Social, Cultural and Organisational. Each dimension is accompanied by criteria, measurement indicators, scores, and feedback on how long it will take to achieve the set goals.

This proposal seems to consolidate the critical distance from the state, as it focuses on capacity building and collaboration, which is essential to strengthen the independence and voice of the organization from the state. On the economic level, it aims to ensure the financial viability of the organization in the medium term (2-3 years) by moving away from an over-dependence on external financing. This ensures the presence of women and youth, organizes community assemblies, and promotes transparency, which is fundamental to ensuring equitable representation and building community trust in the organization. The use of local languages, the integration of traditional knowledge and the promotion of cultural values strengthen identity and social cohesion within the community.

The table provides a clear roadmap on how to strengthen the organization through specific actions with measurable goals in frank collaboration with politicians and NGOs. The different dimensions and associated deadlines show that the organization seeks to achieve balanced and sustainable development, considering both internal structuring and interactions with the external environment. It is crucial that the organization regularly tracks these metrics to adjust its strategies and continuously improve its performance.

4- A RESILIENT PRINCIPLE IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

Despite internal and external pressures, African community-based organizations continue to resist and insist on maintaining their autonomy. This determination is expressed in many social movements and associations that refuse to be reduced to simple relays of public policies or the programs of international donors. As Jean-Marc Ela (1994) reminds us, "African villages must invent their own development paths", stressing that the autonomy of communities is non-negotiable.

Rural women's associations, agricultural cooperatives and community health mutuals regularly state that their practices are different from those of public institutions and that their missions are based on solidarity, citizen participation and social transformation. Following the remarks of feminist activists in West Africa, **Fatou Sow** (2005) insists on the fact that women's movements must constantly reaffirm their relevance and autonomy in the face of attempts at political and institutional recuperation.

The issue of the autonomy of African community-based organizations is identified as unavoidable in many pan-African reports and forums. **CODESRIA** (2005) has shown that African civil society can only fully play its role in defending rights and building democracy if it retains room for manoeuvre that is independent of States and donors.

This principle has been imposed in several citizen mobilization campaigns. For example, in Senegal, the *Y'en a marre* movement has placed autonomy and social justice at the heart of its demands, while in Côte d'Ivoire, the **Community Empowerment Program (PAC)** coordinated by **Oula Inka Ange** illustrates the desire to put African solidarity back at the center of public policies. In these initiatives, autonomy is always associated with two other central demands: adequate financing and social justice.

However, the struggle for the respect of this autonomy remains arduous, due to austerity policies, donor conditionalities and institutional interference that weakens community achievements. As **Olukoshi** (2002) has shown, African states, under budgetary pressure, often favour immediate services to the detriment of political actions for social transformation carried out by organisations. Despite its weaknesses, it remains at the heart of mobilizations and demands, and constitutes an essential foundation for the construction of participatory democracy and endogenous development. It remains to be seen whether unitary campaigns and pan-African coalitions will succeed in developing the balance of power necessary to impose respect for this autonomy.

This rewriting shows that, as in Quebec, autonomy is a **resistant principle** in Africa, but that it faces specific pressures related to international donors, austerity policies and institutional interference.

Table 3: Aspect of resistance to the principle of autonomy in Africa

Appearance	Africa
Origin of pressures	States under structural adjustments, international donors (World Bank, IMF, NGOs), local municipalities.
Nature of threats	Financial dependence on donors, imposed conditionalities, interference in the governance of associations.
Reactions of the organizations	Citizen mobilizations (<i>Y'en a marre</i> in Senegal, PAC in Côte d'Ivoire, peasant cooperatives in Cameroon).
Discourse of resistance	Assertion that "villages must invent their own paths" (Ela, 1994); women's movements insisting on autonomy (Sow, 2005).
Symbols and claims	Central demands: autonomy, social justice, endogenous funding and recognition of local knowledge.
Results	National civil society policies (Mali, 2005), but autonomy weakened by external dependence.
Current issue	Strengthening the balance of power vis-à-vis donors and states, to preserve the community identity.

CONCLUSION

The autonomy of community action in Africa is both a historical demand and a contemporary issue. It reflects the desire of communities to define their own priorities and practices, based on local solidarity and citizen participation. Despite institutional and financial constraints, this autonomy remains at the heart of social mobilizations and debates on governance in Africa. It is an essential lever for the construction of a participatory democracy and for the affirmation of endogenous development.

The analysis carried out shows that autonomy is much more than a simple organizational attribute: it is the founding and structuring principle of the identity of the autonomous community action movement. By allowing communities to define their own priorities, modes of action and values,

autonomy guarantees internal coherence and resilience in the face of external pressures, whether institutional, political or economic.

It is also proving to be a lever for collective emancipation, promoting citizen participation, the appropriation of social issues and the construction of endogenous solutions. Community autonomy is therefore not limited to formal independence: it embodies an identity dynamic, where freedom of action and collective responsibility are articulated to strengthen the legitimacy and sustainability of the movement.

Thus, recognizing and preserving autonomy as a fundamental principle amounts to consolidating local democracy, valuing the knowledge and practices of the communities themselves, and placing community action in a perspective of sustainable and inclusive development. The future of the movement will depend on its ability to maintain this autonomy, while building strategic alliances that respect its identity and its unique role in social transformation.

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