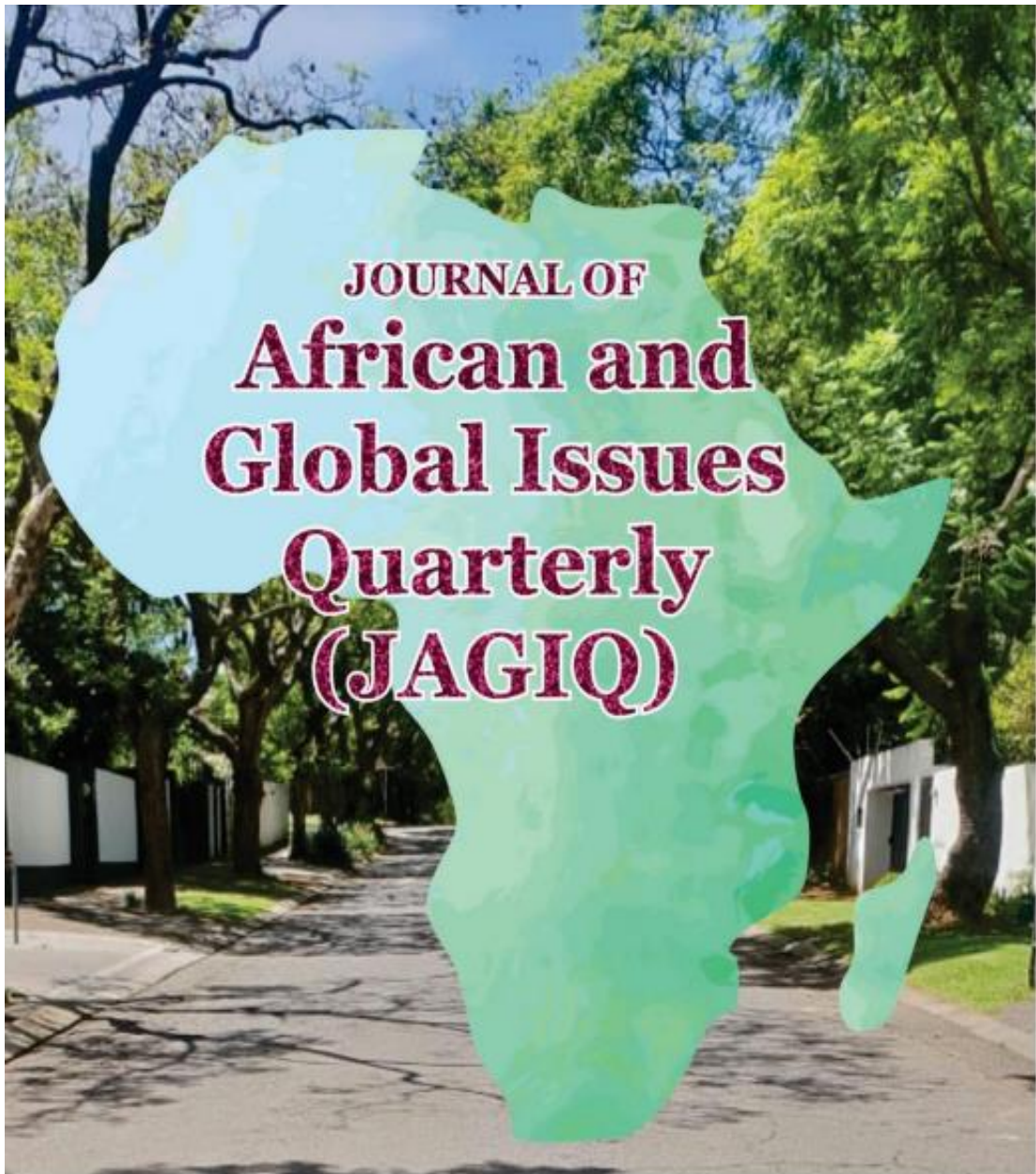




ISSN: 2709-8478 (PRINT)
2710-0073 (ONLINE)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69778/2710-0073/2026/7.3/EN>

Editorial Note

Indigenous Knowledge, Institutional Capacity, And Africa's Quest For Self-Determination

Welcome to the October 2026 issue of the African and Global Issues Quarterly. The collection of articles assembled here reflects the journal's enduring commitment to interrogating the multifaceted challenges and opportunities confronting the African continent and its place in the global order. The contributions in this volume share a common thread: a determination to look inward for solutions while engaging critically with external frameworks and legacies.

Several articles in this issue foreground the imperative of harnessing indigenous knowledge and frameworks as vehicles for progress. Nkemakolam and Amaechi propose "Igbozealotism" as an indigenous framework for socio-political and economic advancement, challenging scholars and policymakers to centre African philosophical traditions in contemporary governance discourse. Similarly, Mthethwa, Kolanisi, and Singh explore the repositioning of indigenous knowledge in fostering "studentpreneurship," while Mahlala and colleagues examine indigenous governance systems through a public administration lens. Kilonzo and her co-authors contribute a profile of indigenous banana cultivars, reminding us that agricultural biodiversity and traditional knowledge are integral to food security and rural livelihoods. These contributions collectively affirm that sustainable development in Africa must be rooted in, rather than detached from, local epistemologies and practices.

The issue also engages critically with questions of institutional effectiveness and the delivery of public goods. Lamidi and Hofisi examine the implementation gap in South African public service delivery, highlighting the centrality of bureaucratic capacity. Malope's study of community health worker programmes illuminates the intersection of recruitment, governance, and the democratisation of public administration. These articles underscore that institutional strengthening is not merely a technical exercise but a deeply political one, requiring accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness to community needs.

On the continental and global stage, Odaudu's analysis of post-Françafrique dynamics in the Sahel offers a penetrating account of shifting dependencies and external realignments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, a region of immense strategic significance. Taleat, Lukamba, and Diedericks examine the localisation of the

Sustainable Development Goals, arguing that global agendas must be adapted to local realities if they are to deliver meaningful prosperity. Maeresera's study of strategic communication and nation branding during Zimbabwe's COMESA chairmanship illustrates the role of media in projecting regional leadership.

Finally, the issue addresses pressing social and demographic concerns. Omopo and Pillay investigate the psychological distress associated with food insecurity and housing conditions among school-going children and adolescents, while Ifanayajo, Palamuleni, and Adebowale provide a decomposition analysis of fertility rates among women of reproductive age in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Taken together, these thirteen articles offer a rich and diverse body of scholarship. They challenge us to think deeply about the relationship between indigenous agency and institutional effectiveness, between local realities and global agendas. We trust that this issue will stimulate further research and debate and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge on African and global affairs.

We thank our authors, reviewers, and readers for their continued support.

Editor

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69778/2710-0073/2026/7.3/a11>

EXPLORING INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS AND TRADITIONAL PRACTICES: A CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary grassroots challenges require authorities to draw on knowledge and expertise from various stakeholders, including custodians of indigenous knowledge and traditional practices. Colonialism in Africa relegated indigenous governance systems and traditional practices to the peripheries of social governance. In South Africa, the new democratic dispensation in 1994 marked a significant shift in state governance, public administration and national politics. This change introduced new actors in managing public resources and policy-making and marked a new beginning for millions of citizens formerly subjected to discrimination, little state protection, and limited avenues for legal recourse through the courts. This

conceptual paper explores how Indigenous governance practices, such as traditional leadership, oral tradition, collective decision-making, community governance, collective ownership, and inclusiveness, which enabled communal self-governance, can be leveraged under the current governance framework in South Africa to solve challenges, particularly those affecting grassroots communities. The paper proposes a hybrid model that incorporates indigenous governance systems into South African governance systems to augment dominant Eurocentric governance models.

Keywords: *Indigenous systems, governance systems, grassroots communities, modern governance, traditional knowledge,*

INTRODUCTION

The paper proposes incorporating indigenous and traditional community management and administration principles into modern governance systems to strengthen the structures and processes established to address citizens' challenges. This paper regards governance as collaborative efforts between institutions and stakeholders designed to pursue specific social goals (Muronda & van der Waldt, 2023). This comprises networks of state and non-state organisations working together to meet citizens' needs (Tapscott, 2017). Understanding governance is essential in Public Administration because it highlights the processes and structures through which public sector decisions are made and implemented to address people's challenges (Muronda & van der Waldt, 2023; Igweta, Magesa & Samita, 2022; Murali et al., 2022). Much of post-colonial Africa adopted Eurocentric governance systems inherited from colonial governments (Ang'ana, 2025; Wu,

2024). Igweta et al. (2020) state that, because of preferences for Eurocentric governance models, most post-colonial African governments considered traditional knowledge and governance systems archaic, obsolete, and counter-developmental, resulting in a deliberate disregard for indigenous knowledge, customs, and systems that could have significantly contributed to developing solutions for contemporary challenges.

Scholars increasingly recognise the importance of adopting traditional knowledge and Indigenous practices to address social challenges and ecological disasters (White et al., 2024). As such, Igweta et al. (2020) propose incorporating these ideas and practices into modern governance systems. Basheka and Auriacombe (2020) demonstrate the value of Indigenous knowledge, practices, and techniques in addressing current governance challenges. Ang'ana (2025) and Wu (2024) note the weaknesses of Westernised governance systems in addressing key challenges, and

Fourie (2022) and Mfete (2020) argue that neoliberalism has failed to address socioeconomic inequality and poor service delivery. This implies that although there was an improvement in the lives of some black people, a large section of the population was left behind. Therefore, an effective and comprehensive system is needed to create opportunities for all (Harvey, 2021).

This paper proposes a hybrid model that combines Indigenous practices with conventional modern governance systems. Recent studies have explored Indigenous governance systems and traditional knowledge (Wane et al., 2022; Dawson et al., 2021; Basheka & Auriacombe, 2020; Igweta et al., 2020); however, they have not proposed incorporating Indigenous governance techniques, practices, and knowledge into existing modern governance systems.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This paper highlights the complex governance challenges facing South Africa. It argues that traditional values, strategies, and knowledge can help address these challenges. This involves incorporating indigenous knowledge and practices into the current governance model. Mlambo, Mubecua and Mlambo (2023) argue that the promise of social and economic development, peace,

democracy, civil liberties, good governance and equitable access to public resources and services has not been successfully achieved in democratic South Africa because the country remains unequal and poverty is high. In addition, corruption, maladministration, and mismanagement of public resources weaken the state's capacity to execute its mandate and meet citizens' needs, resulting in poor service delivery. Given this research problem, the paper proposes a complementary indigenous governance system to augment the current South African governance model. The paper differs from the purely indigenous governance model proposed by Basheka and Auriacombe (2020) and from Samir Amin's (Gumede, 2024) rejection of established Eurocentric social and economic models. The authors argue that completely rejecting Westernised governance systems is unsustainable and unlikely to address existing challenges. Based on this research problem, this paper answers the following questions:

- How were Indigenous communities governed?
- Is it feasible to incorporate indigenous governance perspectives into modern governance approaches?
- What are the theoretical and practical implications of incorporating indigenous governance systems into contemporary public administration in South Africa?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

NPG is a contemporary theoretical view used to explain why governments are increasingly establishing partnerships, collaborations and governance networks with various non-state actors, such as civil society, community organisations, non-governmental organisations and private businesses, to address complex social problems, meet citizens' needs and ensure effective public management (Krogh & Triantafyllou, 2023). According to Torfing, Andersen, Greve and Klausen (2020), NPG captures how governments, in collaboration with business organisations and other stakeholders that have become social governance partners, create systems that allow many government and non-governmental actors to co-produce value and solve current governance problems. From this view, government institutions and actors are no longer the only source of governance solutions and policy ideas, since they can benefit from the knowledge and expertise of various social partners. This emphasis on governance networks highlights the creation of spaces where citizens, community representatives, and other social partners can participate in processes previously reserved for government officials and elected representatives (Torfing et al., 2020).

In this paper, NPG explains the inclusion of non-state actors, such as

traditional leaders, in governance processes. Because the theory posits that modern governments build governance networks with social stakeholders, it helps explain the inclusion of traditional leaders in government functions such as planning and policy implementation.

METHODS

The paper employed a qualitative research methodology. This involved reviewing secondary data: existing literature on indigenous governance systems and traditional practices. The paper used online platforms such as Sabinet, Google Scholar, and Taylor and Francis to search for relevant literature. Search terms included "indigenous governance systems", "traditional governance practices", "indigenous knowledge", "traditional African governance", "pre-colonial governance systems", and "African public administration". Inclusion criteria included peer-reviewed articles and grey literature published between 2000 and 2025, in English, and focusing on indigenous African governance and traditional practices. Exclusion criteria included material published in languages other than English, sources published before 2000, and sources not focusing on indigenous African governance. These criteria enabled the researchers to gather relevant sources.

CONCEPTUALISING INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

Indigenous governance systems refer to the traditional forms of self-governance and decision-making that indigenous peoples have practised for centuries. These systems are deeply rooted in specific indigenous communities' cultural, social, and environmental contexts (Duke et al., 2021). To date, scholars such as Iqweta et al. (2022) argue that current administrations in Africa scarcely acknowledge the existence of indigenous governance systems. Zeleza (2006:197) attests to this. For instance, Asake (2005) notes that many African ethnic groups have unique indigenous governance systems that vary across groups, such as *Njuri-Ncheke* for the Meru elders in Kenya and *Kgosi/Bokgosi* for the *Tswana* people in Botswana (Mburugu & Macharia, 2016; Moatlhaping, 2007). Indigenous societies had customs such as communal decision-making, collective ownership, respect for nature and community governance that can be useful in modern public management (Basheka & Auriacombe, 2020:239). Nagendra and Ostrom (2012) distinguish between two governance systems: externally and internally controlled. Externally controlled governance systems encompass government regimes controlled through external institutions, such as the state or non-

governmental organisations, and they do not incorporate local customs, knowledge and institutions. Internally controlled governance systems are devolved and decentralised. This governance model incorporates grassroots and informal institutions, role players and expertise (Salomon et al., 2018), and it is consistent with indigenous governance systems. The third governance system combines internal and external control. Dawson et al. (2021) noted a hybrid and collaborative governance model comprising external and internal role players and institutions.

Traditional governance systems highlight the viability, to a certain degree, of adopting indigenous models of governing societies based on African constructs, beliefs, and traditions to meet the needs of decentralised and developing world societies that are not wholly Westernised (Wane et al., 2022). For instance, Indigenous people managed lands, natural ecosystems and societies for millennia (Artell et al., 2019; Kia, 2017); this demonstrates the importance of considering the value of traditional philosophies, knowledge, beliefs, values, norms, and governance institutions in contemporary public administration philosophies because they can create solutions for current challenges (Dawson et al., 2021).

ELEMENTS OF INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

Although Indigenous governance comprises many aspects, this paper focuses on traditional leadership, communal governance, oral tradition, inclusiveness, collective ownership and community-centric decision-making.

Traditional leadership and the involvement of elders

Elders and traditional leaders include chiefs, kings, headmen, and other authoritative figures in Indigenous communities. During the colonial era, they served as tribal leaders and played an essential role in social governance (Matsiliza, 2024; Bakamana, Magesa & Majawa,

2021). They led communities, regulated social activities, ensured security, adjudicated disputes, and ensured social stability. In some communities, traditional leaders were revered as divine beings who represented the will and instructions of a superhuman deity (Bakaman et al., 2021). This gave them religious/spiritual, political and administrative authority. This authority rested on a social contract that required leaders to bridge communication between communities and their deities (Iya, 2014). As a result, they had immense authority and were key figures in community governance. Iya (2014) observes that they had several characteristics, including those in Table 1.

Table 1: The functions, characteristics and duties of traditional leaders

Function and characteristics	Duties
Occupied a social or political leadership post	Wielded political power, oversaw social norms and resources, exercised authority, and made rules.
Prestigious figurehead	Enjoyed immense social, political and economic capital
A respected figure	Custodian of cultural and social values
A legitimate authority	Commanded respect and was deemed the legitimate authority in society

An ambassador	A representative of the people to outsiders (rival communities, settlers and foreign traders)
Legislative authority	Embodied Indigenous rules and laws
Judicial authority	Presided over courts, councils and assemblies
A communal elder	A symbol of unity and peace
A warrior or commander-in-chief	Defended the community against aggressors

Traditional leadership is an example of an Indigenous governance system carried over from pre- to post-colonial times because most modern governments recognise it. Traditional leaders currently serve local communities through *imbizos* and by supporting the government's social development efforts (Matsiliza, 2024). However, their role and authority in democratic South Africa are limited because legislation and constitutional provisions have given other public institutions, such as the judiciary, the legislature and public agencies like the police and the army, functions and duties that traditional leaders previously conducted. For example, traditional leaders can no longer adjudicate disputes because such functions fall under the judiciary's purview. Similarly, issues such as oversight of land rights, security and social norms are designated to various public sector institutions. Hence, although traditional leadership is still recognised, its influence and

authority have diminished (Hull, Babalola & Whittal, 2019).

Koenane (2018) suggests that the post-apartheid government has failed to define the role of traditional leaders and incorporate them into the governance system. Enwereji and Uwizeyimana (2020) argue that traditional leaders can be incorporated into existing governance systems to foster “indigenous participative leadership”. This involves integrating them into existing structures so they can serve communities as custodians of diverse opinions and interests. As a result, they can play a meaningful role within the current democratic and legal system. This coexistence can be valuable in areas such as crime prevention and citizen participation in government affairs (Dawson et al., 2021).

Community-Centric Decision-Making

Indigenous governance systems emphasised collective decision-making processes that involved the entire community. The community-centric decision-making processes exemplify participatory democracy (Cavaye, 2004). This approach led community leaders to value and respect the views and opinions of individuals within the community, regardless of social class. This fostered collective, consensus-based decision-making (Horn-Miller, 2013). People's views were incorporated in communal decisions and interventions to address social challenges (Basheka & Auriacombe, 2020) and supported by (Mahlala & Shai, 2022). As a result, Indigenous peoples participated in decision-making processes that safeguarded their cultures, languages, lands, territories, and resources, among other things (Gunn, 2021). For instance, although chieftaincy among Indigenous peoples may appear feudal, the council of elders helped choose a chief. Similarly, many individuals chose village heads and other community leaders. This exemplified community-centric decision-making. Smith and Hunt (2018) support this view, noting that Indigenous communities consisted of complex mixes of members from different cultures. Despite these differences, they valued inclusive decision-making. Therefore,

Indigenous knowledge is community-centric by nature, reflecting community practices and usually possessing a deep connection to land, locale, and community.

Oral Tradition

Many Indigenous governance systems and traditional communities relied on oral traditions to transmit knowledge, history, and laws. According to Lihoma (2012), pre-colonial African cultures stored information, history, lessons, and narratives primarily through oral transmission. These communities lacked sophisticated means of preserving information; therefore, they passed it from person to person and from one generation to the next. As a result, the traditional administrative apparatus of these societies continuously shared information about events, norms and traditions and recorded societal affairs orally. Seipel (2010) notes that indigenous communities differed from prehistoric and ancient societies, whose written records have been preserved since the first Babylonian Empire, which existed in 3300 BC, when individuals recorded information on clay tablets and papyrus. In Indigenous governance systems, storytelling and oral communication were essential for passing down cultural practices and maintaining social cohesion.

Kelbessa (2001) argued that Indigenous knowledge, which was

local and unwritten was essential in shaping people's perceptions of life. Imparting specialised knowledge and skills through oral tradition was a key characteristic of indigenous educational systems. For example, in indigenous societies, children were introduced to various life-skill activities in the village from a young age. Indigenous knowledge is a social construct expressed orally through customs in native tongues, including poetry, drama, song, dance, proverbs, riddles, taboos, folklore, and other forms. According to Khumalo (2019), oral traditions were essential in precolonial African communication systems because they transmitted essential and sensitive information regarding how society should be governed, succession managed, and inheritance preserved.

From a governance perspective, oral traditions were vital because they ensured the continuity of indigenous governance systems by passing customs, traditions, and philosophies down through generations. Notably, this aspect of indigenous governance had many drawbacks. For instance, in today's digital era, where information on governance traditions, legislation, and data is vast, oral tradition is less effective at preserving and sharing knowledge.

Collective Ownership

Many Indigenous societies practised collective ownership and stewardship of resources. Land, water, and other natural resources were often viewed as communal assets rather than individual property. Du Plessis (2011) illustrates this by noting that the perception of value in Indigenous societies differs from its modern or capitalist interpretation. For example, livestock, such as cattle, were coveted in indigenous African societies for reasons not apparent today. Although cattle were valuable because they were used in celebrations, rituals, festivities, and ceremonies, they held little economic value. Given their central role in social and spiritual activities, such a coveted commodity would have been pricey in the modern world. However, in indigenous societies, cattle had more social than economic value because the people valued social relations and norms more than economic benefits. Du Plessis (2011) links this to communal values and collective or communal ownership of specific resources. Lavoie (2018) states that one distinctive feature of Indigenous communities, which recurs across different areas they inhabit, is a noticeable alienation from private ownership of some resources. Lavoie (2018) underscores that Indigenous communities prefer collective ownership and governance of key social resources, rather than private property.

From the perspective of promoting social justice and ensuring that resources, benefits and value are equitably distributed in the community, Meyer and Naicker (2023) state that collectivisation was a key feature of Indigenous communities. These practices and doctrines were embedded in their norms and values; hence, it was second nature for these communities to regard some resources as collectively owned. Meyer and Naicker (2023) adopted this approach to explore power asymmetries, collectivised intellectual property and its impact on knowledge systems among communities in South Africa where the *Aspalathus linearis* plant or rooibos predominantly grows. In the study, the authors argue that indigenous knowledge of plants and other biological species is collectively owned through several proprietary systems created, managed, controlled and used by indigenous communities. Du Plessis (2011) suggests that the idea of owning communal resources, such as land, was limited in pre-colonial communities in South Africa because ownership was “embedded in status relationships,” meaning Indigenous property statutes focused more on individuals’ social obligations to others than on property rights. In other words, individuals valued relationships with other community members more than property rights or economic value (du Plessis, 2011).

As a result, land entitlements were familial obligations rather than a means of excluding other community members from enjoying the resource (du Plessis, 2011).

From an indigenous governance system analysis perspective, this has several implications. First, collective ownership of communal resources placed responsibilities on all community members to preserve and value the property/assets. Second, this formed the bedrock of collective governance because no single entity could leverage dominance over key resources and valuable assets to justify governing the community. Similarly, Lavoie (2018) links Indigenous communities’ collective land ownership to collective self-government. This shows that in Indigenous communities, individuals could not leverage property possession to dominate others since resources were communally owned and managed.

Democracy and inclusiveness

Although Indigenous communities were not democratic in the modern sense, they had practices and norms that enabled community members to be heard. Koenane (2017) argues that traditional African societies were inherently democratic. The author states that although traditional leadership was not a “one-man show” and lacked regular elections, it was consensus-oriented, and leaders were accountable. Similarly,

Matsiliza (2024) states that although traditional leaders and elders led communities, they were not autocrats like ancient leaders and kings who asserted dominance through force, impunity, servitude and exorbitant taxes. Instead, traditional leaders in pre-colonial indigenous societies established systems for ensuring participatory democracy. This allowed community members to contribute their views and register dissatisfaction. This system ensured community leaders listened to the people (Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros & Ruiz Euler, 2019). Although these communities lacked the modern policy-making infrastructure and the neoliberal ideology of democracy and accountability, communal participatory mechanisms ensured they had a say in managing communities and resources (Matsiliza, 2024).

Therefore, Indigenous communities were not as democratic as modern nation-states; nevertheless, their governance systems had democratic and inclusive attributes, resulting in all community members being involved in decision-making on specific communal issues (Murali et al., 2022). This gave common households a voice in the communities' social, political, ecological and economic issues. This underscores that some democratic practices were used to give people a voice and hold leaders accountable. This ensured inclusive communities;

therefore, community members were involved in various governance affairs. This is essential from a governance perspective because it shows decisions were made collectively.

Community governance

Governance encapsulates a system through which diverse stakeholders collaborate to achieve common goals through various public and private institutions and organisations (Muronda & van der Walldt, 2023). Basheka and Auriacombe (2022) state that community governance was a cornerstone of indigenous societies. Community governance refers to participatory governance, characterised by grassroots networking, community participation, civic engagement, and collaborative decision-making (Totikidis et al., 2005). The key objective of community governance is involving communities in governance affairs (Moore, 2021). As a result, Indigenous communities did not need an overbearing authority like colonial governments or state agencies to create or enforce rules; instead, communities decided what was right or wrong and established penalties for wrongdoing. These systems were sustained by collective rules agreed upon and observed by all stakeholders in the community. Rules varied from community to community, resulting in different governance models among

indigenous communities (Ostrom, 2015; Ostrom, 2009). For instance, the *Ashanti* and *Bunyoro-Kitara* kingdoms in West Africa were distinct from those in Southern Africa (Wane et al., 2022). Hence, community governance arrangements are shaped by mutual trust, effective communication and reciprocity. These factors enable communities to self-organise and collectively pursue communal goals (Hausner, Fauchald, Jernsletten, 2012).

Clarke and Stewart (1994) developed the Community Governance Theory to illustrate why power should be devolved to communities. The theory acknowledges that communities have collective interests and goals, and that devolving power to these communities enables them to influence how resources and policies are implemented to address their needs (Halsall et al., 2013). It defines communities as groups of people with common interests, such as students, residents, consumers and patients (Halsall et al., 2013). This aligns with the community governance approach adopted by pre-colonial societies, which had formal and informal structures to ensure people were involved in decision-making and leaders were held accountable.

Hausner et al. (2012) suggest that community governance initiatives must collaborate with formal governance systems to produce the

desired outcomes in the contemporary world. This demonstrates the viability of a hybrid governance approach in meeting community needs. In practice, formalised governance techniques provide the structure, or bedrock, of governance (resources, regulations, personnel, and macro institutions), while community governance arrangements incorporate local knowledge, customs, and traditions into how communities are governed and their needs are met.

CRITICISM FOR INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL IDEAS IN BUREAUCRATIC GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

Despite its potential to address existing governance challenges in South Africa, some criticism has been levelled at integrating traditional values and indigenous knowledge with modern bureaucratic governance systems. Mkhacani and Shai (2026) indicate that although traditional leadership institutions were the norm in precolonial times, they are now restricted to specific areas, particularly rural communities. While the post-apartheid government recognises the role of traditional leadership in local communities, its legitimacy in bureaucratic government systems is not universally acknowledged and is also limited in scope.

The worldview of indigenous knowledge and traditional

governance systems often clashes with models of governing modern societies. For example, while the former values community consensus, traditional leadership and collective ownership, the latter prioritises market growth, bureaucratic governance and judicial systems with formal courts and legal codes (Maphumulo, 2026). Indigenous values and knowledge are often context-specific and suited to local contexts, with specific beliefs, values, practices, and norms (Mkhacani & Shai, 2026). This makes it difficult to scale them up and apply them at a national or macro level, particularly in a multiracial and multiethnic country such as South Africa. Regulating indigenous values and codifying them into national laws is also difficult because they are diverse and context-specific. Hence, although these values were ideal and practical in pre-colonial times, they are difficult to adopt within a bureaucratic governance system. This clash of worldviews makes bureaucratic government systems incompatible with Indigenous knowledge and traditional governance ideas.

Ayeni, Aborisade and Soneye (2026) state that modern bureaucratic public governance systems are built on formal institutions, legal frameworks and political ideologies. Merging these systems with informal, fluid traditional norms based on local values, communal consensus,

contextual values, and moral philosophies creates institutional challenges and inefficient public governance. This results in an ineffective bureaucracy, inefficient public institutions and poor oversight. According to Oloruntoba and Olaitan (2023), traditional systems were built on patriarchal ideas, which marginalised women and minorities. It is difficult to reconcile such systems with South Africa's constitutional democracy, which is built on fairness, redress, human equality, and the Bill of Rights. Therefore, integration traditional values with South Africa's governance systems can undo decades of progress the government has achieved with regards to addressing inequality and promoting human rights, particularly among minorities, women, children and previously disadvantaged members of society.

DISCUSSION

The previous section outlined how community governance, collective ownership, oral traditions, inclusiveness and traditional leaders and elders were the bedrock of Indigenous governance systems. It showed that Indigenous governance was grounded in stewardship, social justice, and the preservation of natural resources (Artell et al., 2019). Based on these insights, this section discusses the relevance of indigenous governance systems to contemporary public governance.

The paper highlights that the pre-colonial Indigenous institutions were embedded in their societies. In other words, communities did not consider them distant or alien institutions that overlapped their way of life. As a result, they were central to people's spiritual, economic, and political affairs. Indigenous institutions were aligned with people's beliefs, norms, and values, so governance institutions reflected their social values and norms. This made them legitimate and impactful (Kia, 2017). Therefore, traditional governance suggests that a governance system should be embedded in people's way of life. Citizens should identify and relate to how public policies are implemented and how resources are managed. Furthermore, governance principles should reflect the citizens' norms and values. This allows citizens to participate actively and remain committed to public affairs. For example, Igweta et al. (2020) suggest that indigenous governance systems, by emphasising collective ownership and participation, kept people at the centre of communal administration and governance. This enhanced their legitimacy and created a bond between communities and the customs and norms that bound them to specific practices and ethos.

Most importantly, collective governance inspired a sense of ownership, leading community members to commit to common

goals. In contrast, the Westernised governance model in African countries feels distant to citizens, who feel alienated. Some authors recommend revisiting this model by incorporating indigenous governance practices and norms (Igweta et al., 2020). This will increase citizens' participation in government affairs and encourage public leaders, politicians and administrators to engage citizens in public affairs. For example, the Weberian state governance philosophy followed by the apartheid government was overbearing, hierarchical, instructional and unrepresentative. This alienated it from the citizens (Tapscott, 2017). The new government followed a New Public Management philosophy to address this. However, this weakened the state by outsourcing key state functions. This is demonstrated by poor services, corruption, weak state institutions, financial mismanagement and the high incidence of service delivery protests across the country (Tapscott, 2017). Hence, an effective governance system cannot curb high unemployment, poor services, frequent protests, low economic growth and corruption (Harvey, 2021). This shows that weak state institutions cannot meet citizens' needs. For example, the riots and looting in parts of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal in July 2021 demonstrated weak government institutions and citizen

dissatisfaction. These insights demonstrate the importance of adopting a citizen-centred governance model responsive to community needs. Hence, practitioners should draw lessons from Indigenous governance systems to ensure that modern governance is legitimate and engaging. This enables citizens to participate in public affairs instead of resorting to violence and anarchy. This paper recommends that Public Administration scholars, policy-makers, and public leaders generate practical lessons on inclusivity and citizen engagement from Indigenous governance principles.

Artelle et al. (2019) and Igweta et al. (2022) advocate promoting indigenous knowledge, practices, and governance systems to address modern governance and public policy challenges. For example, Artelle et al. (2019) support this line of reasoning by highlighting the success of incorporating traditional knowledge, values, norms, and ecological principles to combat environmental degradation, given the perennial failures of top-down, non-inclusive, and instruction-based interventions implemented by the government and NGOs. Artelle et al. (2019) advocate including affected communities in decision-making and interventions to address their challenges because they have first-hand experience and can assess the effectiveness of proposed solutions.

For instance, ecological conservation methods aligned with modern instructional governance models failed because they are not inclusive and downplay the negative impact of ineffective colonial governance. This deprives them of local knowledge, support, and solidarity, resulting in communities not engaging in grassroots activities that could benefit from their participation (Artelle et al., 2019). For contemporary governance scholars and policy-makers, this shows that solutions to some local challenges are more effective when communities are involved. For instance, communities nationwide are at the forefront of various environmental and service delivery challenges (Harvey, 2021). Hence, interventions to address these should incorporate their views and enlist their participation and support. Several white elephant projects in South Africa, such as the GO! Durban project, the Emakhazeni High Altitude Training Centre in Mpumalanga, and the Mayibuye Primary School in Gauteng (Moichel, 2023; Ngema, 2022; Yende, 2022) highlight the pitfalls of poor planning, mismanagement, corruption, and lacklustre community involvement in addressing grassroots challenges. Therefore, involving communities and other stakeholders when proposing solutions is crucial because it enables them to contribute

valuable perspectives and experiences.

Insights from Indigenous communities studied by Artelle et al. (2019) highlight how governance systems can effectively address grassroots challenges. Because conventional governance philosophies aim to leverage stakeholder engagement to pursue common goals, involving community members and other grassroots organisations enables public institutions to find effective solutions to social challenges. Kia (2017) notes that indigenous communities' traditional governing principles and institutions can be repurposed to address challenges facing modern local and regional governments. Kia (2017) proposes a hybrid governance approach incorporating modern and traditional principles. This approach can support environmental management and mobilise local resources for environmental conservation initiatives. This proposition is grounded in the belief that traditional institutions align with social values and norms. This makes them effective because communities regard them as legitimate and aligned with their beliefs and values. As a result, they can manage social affairs and grassroots challenges, such as local economic development, managing public resources, resolving conflicts, and mobilising communities for specific causes (Kia, 2017), like combating crime,

drug use, littering, and vandalism of public infrastructure. These insights are crucial for modern governance systems because they demonstrate the effectiveness of incorporating indigenous governance principles, since communities support them. They also create avenues for stakeholder involvement. This approach can address social issues in local municipalities in South Africa (Kia, 2017). Kia's (2017) primary argument mirrors Artelle et al.'s (2019) views. In both cases, the authors argue that indigenous governance structures and principles, replaced by colonial governance systems and later neoliberal philosophies in the post-colonial era, were well suited to address governance functions, particularly at the community level. Therefore, a holistic approach to addressing grassroots challenges should ensure that formal modern bureaucratic institutions interact with indigenous systems.

PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE

Because the paper proposes extensive governance changes by incorporating indigenous principles and practices, it has implications for public sector administration and management, policy-making, and scholarship. Notably, Basheka and Auriacombe (2020) caution policy-

makers and public administration scholars to consider indigenous governance principles as practical interventions for existing challenges or as intellectual contributions to the discipline's discourse.

This implies that public sector managers should explore incorporating Indigenous administrative practices and principles into public policy implementation or the execution of state functions. For example, collective ownership and community governance strategies can be used in grassroots projects to elicit citizens' support. This will address the challenge of citizens' apathy and vandalism that projects often face in South Africa. This intervention will harness community resources and social capital for government projects. Government departments can also leverage existing knowledge and community role players to explore solutions to community challenges. These interventions can address local challenges such as land reform and use, health, public participation, environmental management, and disputes. This implies that policymakers and legislators should promulgate laws and develop policies to recognise traditional practices. This will lay the groundwork for incorporating them into public-sector decision-making processes. These changes will ensure that traditional practices, indigenous knowledge, and principles are

incorporated into the existing governance model, resulting in a hybrid governance system with elements of traditional practices and conventional neoliberal ideas and norms.

This also requires a conducive legal and institutional framework. Hence, policymakers should enact laws that enable the adoption of a hybrid governance model. Legislation such as the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act (No. 3 of 2019) in the local government sphere provides a roadmap for how legislation can legitimise traditional values and incorporate them into existing bureaucratic governance systems. At an institutional level, policymakers should establish traditional or indigenous advisory councils. This will create avenues for traditional leaders and grassroots communities to participate in policy-making and other bureaucratic activities.

Regarding teaching, learning, and research in Public Administration, this implies that scholars and researchers must investigate in depth the strategies, techniques, and philosophies of Indigenous governance systems to develop a sound, scientific narrative on how to incorporate these practices into modern governance approaches. In addition, scholars and researchers must document and explore the vestiges of Indigenous governance principles practised today, particularly in rural areas or among

traditional leaders. This will build sound academic knowledge of traditional systems and Indigenous practices, making it easier to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of adopting them.

CONCLUSION

The paper proposes incorporating Indigenous knowledge and governance systems into modern governance philosophies to enable bureaucratic institutions and local communities to benefit from traditional knowledge, expertise and practices when addressing social challenges. The literature reviewed in the paper indicated that several scholars advocate including Indigenous knowledge and practices in contemporary governance systems, particularly those focusing on grassroots and ecological challenges. These insights have

several implications for Public Administration and public policy implementation. For instance, researchers should explore indigenous knowledge and governance systems and assess the benefits of incorporating them into modern governance processes. Policymakers should promulgate legislation to accommodate indigenous systems in modern governance processes and allow traditional leaders, experts and key role players to participate in grassroots governance affairs.

Acknowledgments

This paper received no funding or grant support.

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