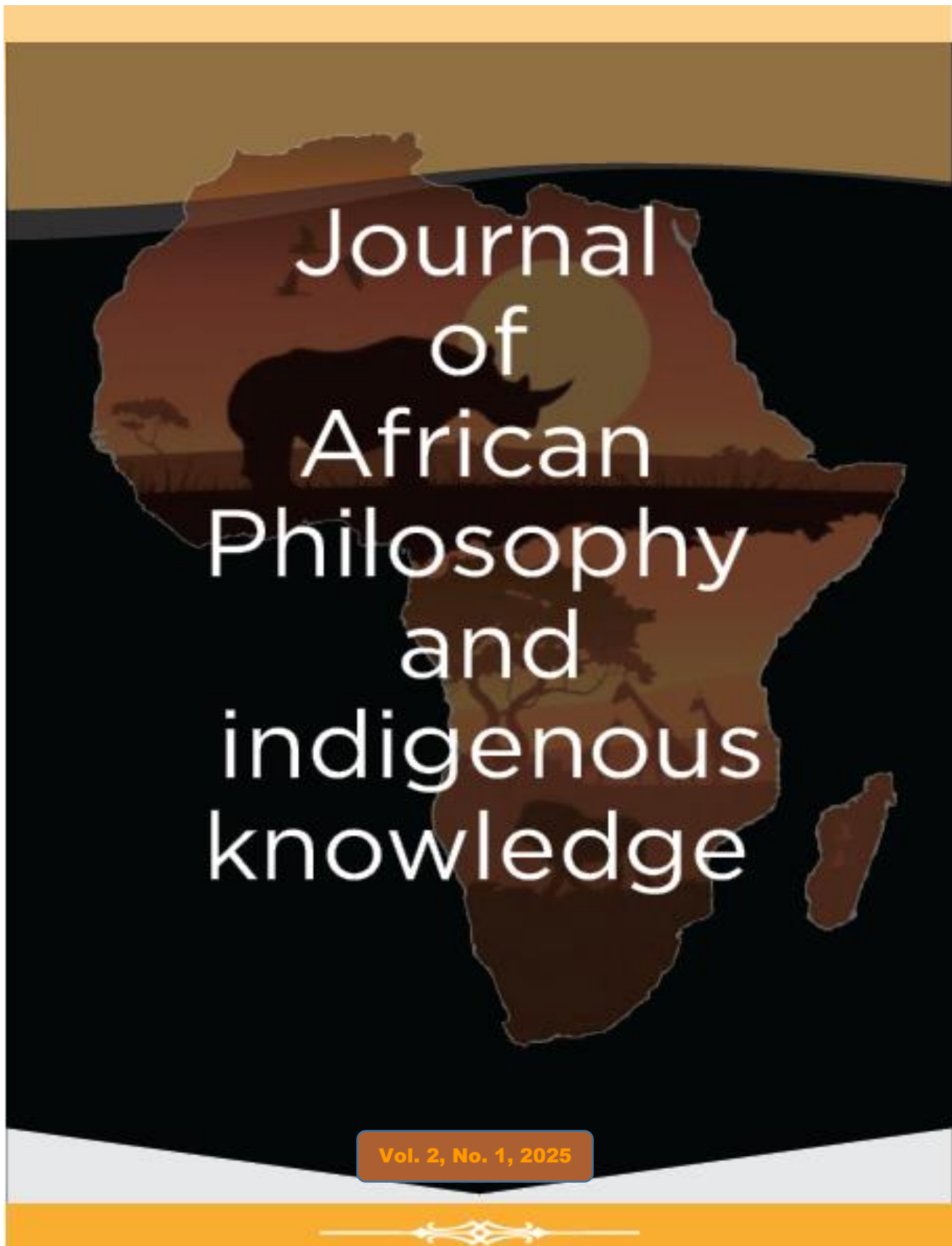




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Editorial Note

This issue of the *Journal of African Philosophy and Indigenous Knowledge* presents a diverse yet intellectually unified collection of papers that examine African realities through indigenous epistemologies, philosophical analysis, institutional inquiry, and socio-cultural critique. Collectively, these contributions reaffirm the journal's commitment to centering African knowledge systems while engaging with contemporary debates in health, education, governance, technology, morality, religion, and development.

Several papers in this issue critically examine the relevance of indigenous epistemologies in addressing enduring social challenges. For example, the paper titled *Indigenous Epistemologies and the Reconfiguration of Mental Health in Urban Lagos State, Nigeria*, interrogates the dominance of Western biomedical paradigms in African mental health discourse. Drawing on qualitative interviews with indigenous practitioners, including *Babaláwo* and *Oníṣẹ̀gùn*, the study demonstrates that mental distress is locally understood as a relational and communal condition shaped by spiritual balance, moral conduct, and ancestral continuity. The paper argues for a pluralistic mental health framework that meaningfully integrates indigenous knowledge into urban mental health policy and practice in Nigeria.

Closely aligned with this epistemic revaluation is the paper on poverty amidst plenty in Nigeria, which interrogates the paradox of persistent poverty despite the country's abundant natural and human resources. Challenging Western-led development paradigms, the study examines African Indigenous Knowledge Systems as adaptive and pragmatic tools for alleviating poverty. By examining indigenous agriculture, informal economic networks, community governance, and traditional healthcare, the paper argues that indigenous knowledge constitutes a living system capable of complementing formal development policies. It advocates for hybrid development models that integrate indigenous practices into education, finance, and governance structures.

The issue also addresses questions of gender, education, and institutional transformation. The study on shifting gender dynamics at Midlands State University in Zimbabwe presents a longitudinal analysis of graduation trends from 2017 to 2023. Using a mixed-methods approach, the paper examines the decline in male graduation rates alongside increased female participation, situating this shift within broader socio-cultural, economic, and policy contexts. The findings link changing gender patterns to affirmative action policies and inclusive education initiatives, contributing to ongoing debates on gender equity and the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive education.

Institutional roles in development are further explored in the paper on religious institutions and grassroots development in Nigeria. Conceptualising religious institutions as faith-based, non-state actors, the study examines their contributions to welfare provision, humanitarian services, healthcare, education, and socio-economic justice, particularly in contexts where local government presence is weak. While acknowledging concerns about abuse and extremist tendencies, the paper highlights the complementary role of religious institutions in grassroots governance and recommends regulatory frameworks, including whistle-blowing mechanisms, to safeguard development outcomes.

Technology and institutional efficiency form the focus of the study on office automation in Oyo State-owned polytechnics. Employing a descriptive survey design and quantitative analysis, the paper demonstrates a significant positive relationship between office automation and job performance among office managers. The findings underscore the importance of technological transformation in public institutions and recommend upgrading work environments to enhance productivity and administrative efficiency.

Another key thematic strand in this issue concerns the preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge in the digital age. The paper on digital preservation and documentation of indigenous knowledge in Africa explores how digital technologies, including databases and machine learning tools, can support the safeguarding of Africa's knowledge heritage. Drawing on case studies from Kenya, Nigeria, and Southern Africa, the study highlights both the opportunities and ethical challenges of digital preservation, emphasising community ownership, cultural sensitivity, and sustainable partnerships as critical to success.

Finally, the paper on contemporary African culture and religion interrogates their influence on the continent's socio-economic development. Using historical and phenomenological approaches, the study attributes Africa's developmental challenges to cultural practices and religious orientations that, in the author's analysis, perpetuate corruption, injustice, and social fragmentation. The paper calls for a critical restructuring of cultural and religious frameworks in alignment with global best practices to enable sustainable development.

Taken together, the contributions in this issue demonstrate the continued relevance of African philosophy and indigenous knowledge in addressing contemporary African challenges. By engaging indigenous epistemologies alongside institutional, ethical, and technological analyses, this volume advances critical conversations on how Africa can draw on its intellectual traditions while navigating modern transformations. The editorial team acknowledges the authors, reviewers, and contributors whose scholarship has made this issue possible and looks forward to continued engagement with rigorous, context-sensitive, and transformative African scholarship. You are invited to enjoy the intellectual content of this issue.

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POVERTY AMIDST PLENTY: CAN AFRICAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SALVAGE THE POVERTY CRISIS? THE CASE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract:

Despite Nigeria's enormous natural and human resources, the country remains entrapped in chronic poverty and developmental fragility. This paradox of "poverty amidst plenty" raises crucial questions about the sustainability and appropriateness of Western-led development paradigms that often marginalise local epistemologies. This paper explores whether African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) can serve as a transformative tool for poverty alleviation in Nigeria. Through a qualitative synthesis of ethnographic studies, policy documents, and secondary data, the paper examines how indigenous agricultural practices, community-based governance, traditional healthcare, and informal economic networks sustain livelihoods where modern systems fail. The findings reveal that indigenous knowledge is not merely cultural residue but a living system of adaptive intelligence with potential to complement formal poverty reduction policies, where development is defined socioeconomically and culturally by the people, for the people and from the people. The paper concludes that the revalorisation of indigenous knowledge through integration into education, agriculture, economics and governance, offers a pragmatic pathway toward inclusive and sustainable development. Specifically, the Nigeria government and financial operatives should link traditional savings and investment schemes with Microfinance Banks in rural and semi-urban areas to empower low-income groups to foster a hybrid rural economy of AIKS.

Keywords: Poverty, Indigenous Knowledge, Development, Nigeria, Sustainability, Local Innovation,

1. Introduction

The main argument of this paper is that Nigeria's persistent poverty crisis reflects a deeper epistemological crisis, a disconnection from Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) that have historically sustained communities. The rediscovery and institutionalisation of African Indigenous Knowledge (AIK) can reorient development towards cultural relevance, inclusivity, and sustainability. Thus, indigenous knowledge is not a relic of the past but a resource for the future, a pathway to bridge the poverty paradox in the midst of plenty. For example, Hoenders, et al. (2024) argue that some patients in hospitals boycott the modern medicine in favour of indigenous healthcare services, thereby putting importance on IKS.

Please, get me right. I do not reject modernity in knowledge importation and sharing but harmonising it with the philosophy of IK. Nigeria, the focus of this study, represents one of the most striking cases of the *poverty amidst plenty* paradox in Africa. With vast oil reserves, fertile agricultural lands, and a youthful population exceeding 200 million, the country paradoxically records high poverty rates. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), over 40% of Nigerians live below the national poverty line, and multidimensional poverty indices reveal even deeper deprivation in rural and peri-urban areas. Reference to World Bank (2023), the Nigeria's economy faced significant headwinds in early 2023, driven by

both global uncertainties and domestic distortions. The global economic landscape remains fragile, with lingering impacts from the pandemic, geopolitical tensions, and inflationary pressures.

Hence, the conventional poverty alleviation programmes, ranging from the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) of the 1980s to recent initiatives such as N-Power and Trader Moni, have largely failed to achieve their objectives. Scholars (Eboh, 2019; Okereke & Ajakaiye, 2021) attribute this failure to the neglect of context-specific, people-centred, and culturally grounded strategies. Indigenous knowledge, long dismissed as “non-scientific,” has re-emerged as a credible source of resilience, adaptation, and innovation.

In Nigeria, there is indigenous plant cultivation and rural livelihoods. Indigenous knowledge guiding the cultivation of indigenous fruits and vegetables in rural Nigeria has been shown to improve household income and livelihoods (Olowo, Omotayo, Lawal, & Aremu, 2022). The traditional water management practices rooted in indigenous knowledge systems in *Central Nigerian communities* help secure water resources for domestic use, agricultural needs, and small-scale economic activities. (Kana, Modibbo, & Kpalo, 2025). Again, the Nigerian smallholder farmers embrace indigenous knowledge to increase food security for the rural areas. Evidence demonstrates that smallholder farmers rely heavily on indigenous agricultural practices (Olawuyi, Ijila, Adegbite, Olawuyi, & Farayola, 2024). In Nigeria, Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and practices are typically passed down through oral tradition, relying heavily on memory, which can lead to distortions and inaccuracies over time (Okorafor, 2010). Also, IK is in practice in medicine (Atawodi et al., 2002) in Nigeria.

This paper therefore interrogates the question: Can African Indigenous Knowledge salvage Nigeria’s poverty crisis? Specifically, it qualitatively examines how indigenous systems of knowledge, rooted in community, reciprocity, and sustainability, can be harnessed for poverty alleviation and human development.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Concept of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) represents a dynamic system of understandings, skills, and philosophies developed by local communities through long-term interaction with their environments. It is cumulative, adaptive, and transmitted intergenerationally through oral traditions, apprenticeships, and communal practices (Warren, 1991; Odora-Hoppers, 2002). As such, IK is not static folklore but a living repository of practical wisdom that informs decisions on agriculture, medicine, ecology, and governance (Agrawal, 1995). Its embeddedness in specific cultural and ecological contexts makes it inherently place-based and experience-driven, enabling communities to survive under conditions of resource scarcity and social inequality.

In Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, IK encompasses a wide spectrum of systems and institutions, including indigenous agricultural techniques, traditional health care systems, community-based financial cooperatives, and customary governance mechanisms (Oguamanam, 2006; Emeagwali & Shizha, 2016). These systems function not merely as cultural artifacts but as pragmatic frameworks for socio-economic resilience, sustainability, and equity. For example, traditional soil fertility management (such as intercropping and fallowing), indigenous seed preservation, and herbal medicine demonstrate locally evolved scientific logics that are often more sustainable than externally introduced technologies (Altieri, 2004b).

Furthermore, IK functions as a knowledge commons—a shared social resource that promotes participatory innovation and collective welfare (Dei, 2012). This communal epistemology contrasts sharply with the individualistic, profit-oriented paradigms of Western development models, offering a people-centered approach that aligns with sustainable development principles (UNESCO, 2019). Within the Nigerian context, integrating IK into formal development and poverty reduction strategies could enhance policy relevance, community ownership, and resilience in the face of ecological and economic uncertainty.

Despite its value, IK has often been marginalized in academic and policy spaces due to epistemological hierarchies established during colonial and postcolonial periods (Escobar,

1995; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Postcolonial theorists argue that this epistemic marginalization constitutes a form of cognitive injustice, whereby local knowledge systems are dismissed as inferior or unscientific. Hence, reclaiming and mainstreaming IK into contemporary development discourse is both an epistemological and a developmental imperative.

Thus, IK should be conceptualised not as an alternative to modern science, but as a complementary system that enhances context sensitivity, inclusivity, and sustainability in poverty reduction frameworks. This study therefore positions IK as a locally legitimate epistemic system capable of addressing Nigeria’s *poverty amidst plenty* paradox through adaptive, community-driven strategies that merge local wisdom with modern innovation. The indigenous knowledge system that serve as complimentary to modern science is presented in Figure 1.

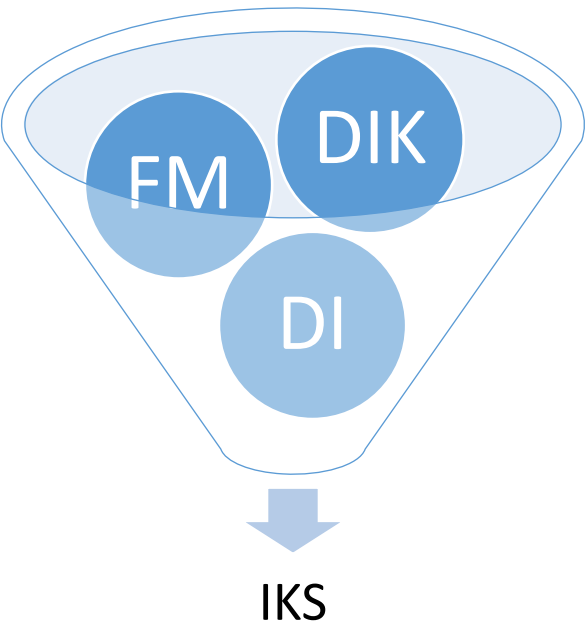


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of Indigenous Knowledge Systems
Source: Author

Figure 1 demonstrates that Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is a flow or a system that consists of three major compartments: Dimensions of Indigenous Knowledge (DIK), Functional Mechanisms (FM), and Development Implications (DI). These dimensions highlight the holistic nature of Indigenous Knowledge, which emphasises interconnectedness and living in harmony with nature.

The DIK compartment explains the various dimensions of indigenous knowledge, including ecological knowledge (understanding local ecosystems and conservation practices), technological knowledge (traditional farming, medicine, and crafts), socioeconomic knowledge (cooperatives, exchange, and solidarity), institutional knowledge (customary law and conflict mediation), and spiritual-cultural knowledge (values, beliefs, and cosmology). The Functional Mechanism (FM) compartment ensures that the dimensions of indigenous knowledge are actualized.

The second compartment is the FM, The functional mechanisms of indigenous knowledge (IK) are rooted in traditional practices that promote sustainability and resilience. These mechanisms include adaptive resource management, which enables communities to adjust to changing environmental conditions and ensure the long-term health of natural resources; communal decision-making, which involves collective participation and consensus-building to make decisions that benefit the community as a whole. Other mechanisms include social security nets and reciprocity, which provide a safety net for community members in times of need and foster a sense of mutual support and cooperation; environmental mechanisms, which recognize the intricate relationship between humans and the natural world and promote practices that conserve and protect the environment. Finally, intergenerational knowledge transfer ensures the passing down of traditional knowledge and skills from one

generation to the next, preserving cultural heritage and promoting continuity

The third compartment explains the development implications (DI) of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). Indigenous Knowledge has significant development implications in areas such as poverty alleviation, where context-sensitive solutions tailored to local needs are implemented. Additionally, it enhances livelihood resilience by strengthening communities through sustainable resource management. Inclusive governance is also promoted, where governments recognize indigenous rights and perspectives. Other areas include food and health security, which promotes traditional practices for nutritious food and health, and sustainable human development, which fosters equity, justice, and environmental stewardship.

Hence, the framework in Figure 1 posits that when these mechanisms are recognised and integrated into formal development strategies, they enhance contextual relevance, social inclusivity, and sustainability of interventions. Ultimately, the model links IK to measurable development implications such as livelihood resilience, inclusive governance, and human development capable of enhancing poverty reduction outcomes.

2.2 The Poverty-Amidst-Plenty Paradox

The *poverty amidst plenty paradox* in the context of this paper describes the persistent condition in which resource-rich economies experience poor welfare outcomes and widespread deprivation despite abundant endowments. Empirical studies identify this as the resource curse, whereby heavy dependence on primary commodities, particularly oil and gas, correlates with slow growth, governance decay and rising inequality (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013; van der Ploeg, 2011). Cross-country econometric studies show that countries with large natural resource

rents often record weaker institutional performance, lower human capital investment, and heightened volatility (Auty, 2001; Collier & Hoeffler, 2005). These patterns are typically mediated by rent seeking, corruption, and the crowding out of productive sectors, especially agriculture and manufacturing.

In Nigeria, the paradox is especially pronounced. Despite over five decades of oil exports and cumulative petroleum earnings exceeding \$1 trillion, more than 40 percent of Nigerians live below the national poverty line, while multidimensional poverty affects roughly 63 percent of the population (National Bureau of Statistics, NBS, 2022; World Bank, 2023). Empirical analyses attribute this outcome to three interlocking mechanisms. First, *Dutch diseasedynamics* have undermined tradable sectors as oil inflows appreciate the real exchange rate and reduce agricultural competitiveness (Iwayemi, 2019; Olayeni, 2020). Second, *institutional capture* of oil rents by elites has eroded public sector accountability and weakened redistributive capacity (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013; Okon & Egbon, 2021). Third, *conflict externalities*, especially in the Niger Delta, have disrupted livelihoods through environmental degradation and insecurity (Ikelegbe, 2013; Obi, 2019, Iwayemi,). Collectively, these mechanisms demonstrate that resource wealth in Nigeria has not translated into broad-based welfare improvement but rather entrenched spatial and class inequalities.

Beyond economics, Escobar (1995), in a post-development critique, offers a complementary interpretive lens. He argues that “*developmentalism*” i.e. the dominance of Eurocentric, technocratic development models, reconfigures local realities into abstract categories manageable by external expertise. Empirically, this critique resonates with studies of externally designed poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria that fail to engage indigenous institutions or knowledge systems, thereby producing limited or unsustainable outcomes (Eboh, 2019; Odora Hoppers, 2002). Hence, the *poverty-amidst-plenty paradox* is not only material but also epistemological. It reflects both governance failures and the marginalisation of endogenous knowledge systems capable of sustaining equitable development.

2.2.1 Data Evidence on Resource-Poverty Disconnect in Nigeria

The data drawn from World Bank WDI (2024), NBS (2022) and IMF (2023) reports, are harmonised to highlight the *resource-poverty disconnect* in Nigeria as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Nigeria’s Resource Wealth and Poverty Indicators, 1990–2022

Year	Oil Rents (% of GDP)	GDP Growth (%)	Manufacturing Value Added (% of GDP)	Poverty Headcount (%)	Multidimensional Poverty (%)	Gini Index	Notes/Context
1990	38.5	8.2	8.1	46.0	n/a	43.5	Early oil boom, SAP reforms under IMF adjustment
2000	44.2	5.4	6.9	65.6	n/a	42.9	Rising oil prices, weak diversification
2010	27.5	7.8	7.0	62.6	54.0	43.0	High oil earnings, yet high poverty rate
2015	16.9	2.7	9.2	48.9	50.5	35.1	Oil price crash; austerity measures
2019	9.1	2.2	12.3	40.1	47.3	35.0	NBS poverty survey; stagnating growth
2022	11.5	3.1	13.0	41.0	63.0	36.8	NBS MPI 2022: 133 million poor despite oil recovery

Sources: World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2024); NBS (2022); IMF World Economic Outlook (2023).

Table 1 vividly illustrates the paradox of poverty amidst plenty. Although oil rents have historically constituted between 20 - 45% of Nigeria's GDP, poverty levels have remained persistently high, exceeding 60% in both monetary and multidimensional terms. Periods of high oil earnings (e.g., 2000 - 2010) coincide with limited improvements in welfare outcomes, while non-oil sectors such as manufacturing remain marginal. The Gini Index values suggest enduring inequality, reflecting the *elite capture of rents* and exclusion of rural populations from development and democratic dividends.

This temporal pattern aligns with Sala-I-Martin and Subramanian's (2013) findings that oil rents in Nigeria have had negligible or rather, negative effects on poverty reduction due to weak governance, rent dissipation and limited investment in human capital. The stagnation of manufacturing and agriculture confirms the Dutch disease mechanism, where resource inflows undermine competitiveness of productive sectors (van der Ploeg, 2011).

These quantitative trends empirically reinforce Escobar (1995) argument on *developmentalism*: that externally modelled economic frameworks have failed to resonate with local socio-productive realities, deepening rather than resolving poverty. In Nigeria's case, the paradox is thus both structural and epistemic which is a product of extractive political economy and the neglect of indigenous development knowledge.

2.3 Theoretical Lens: Postcolonial Development Theory

This paper relies on the Postcolonial Development Theory (PDT). PDT provides a critical framework for interrogating how knowledge, power and representation shape development practice, especially in formerly colonised societies. Emerging from the broader postcolonial discourse (Said, 1978; Spivak,

1988; Bhabha, 1994), it challenges the assumption that Western development paradigms represent universal pathways to progress. Rather, it exposes how these models often reproduce dependency, epistemic subordination and social exclusion in the global south (Escobar, 1995; Sachs, 2010).

At its core, PDT argues that *development is not a neutral, technocratic enterprise* but a historically contingent project rooted in the colonial encounter (Crush, 1995). The language and institutions of development, i.e. planning, modernization, poverty alleviation and economic growth, reflect what Escobar (1995) describes as the "*colonization of reality*," (p.5) where Western epistemologies define what counts as knowledge, progress, and civilisation. This dominance delegitimises local, indigenous, and subaltern ways of knowing, producing a hierarchy in which the developed instruct the underdeveloped.

Further, Sachs (2010) and Rahnema and Bawtree (1997) argue that the development apparatus sustains a moral and epistemological order that perpetuates inequality by presenting the Western experience as the normative benchmark. As a result, policy interventions, often donor-driven and externally financed, tend to ignore indigenous worldviews, communal relations, and local systems of resilience. This theoretical critique is especially relevant to the African condition, where imported models of growth, governance, and poverty reduction frequently fail to resonate with socio-cultural realities of African systems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

In the Nigerian context, postcolonial development theory offers a powerful interpretive lens for understanding the *poverty amidst plenty paradox*. Decades of development planning, from the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the 1980s to contemporary poverty-reduction strategies, have largely replicated Western modernisation assumptions privileging market liberalisation,

formal sector growth, and technological transfers (Eboh, 2019). Yet, these approaches have produced limited poverty reduction because they neglect Nigeria's indigenous institutions of cooperation, community-based resource management, and social welfare embedded in traditional governance systems.

Postcolonial theorists advocate for *epistemic decolonization* which is a deliberate process of reclaiming and revalidating local knowledge as co-equal with scientific or Western knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Odora Hoppers, 2002). This approach does not reject modern science but calls for *Epistemological pluralism*, that is, the coexistence and interaction of multiple knowledge systems in solving development challenges (de Sousa Santos, 2014). Within this framework, African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) are not seen as relics of the past but as living, adaptive frameworks for human survival, resource management and social justice.

Therefore, by grounding this study in PDT, the analysis moves beyond diagnosing Nigeria's poverty crisis in purely economic terms. It instead interrogates the deeper *epistemic inequalities* that shape how development is conceived, who defines it and whose knowledge counts in policy formulation. The theory provides the intellectual justification for exploring indigenous knowledge not as a complementary curiosity but as a *central epistemic resource* capable of informing more inclusive, culturally grounded, and sustainable poverty alleviation strategies. This theoretical analysis is presented in Figure 2.

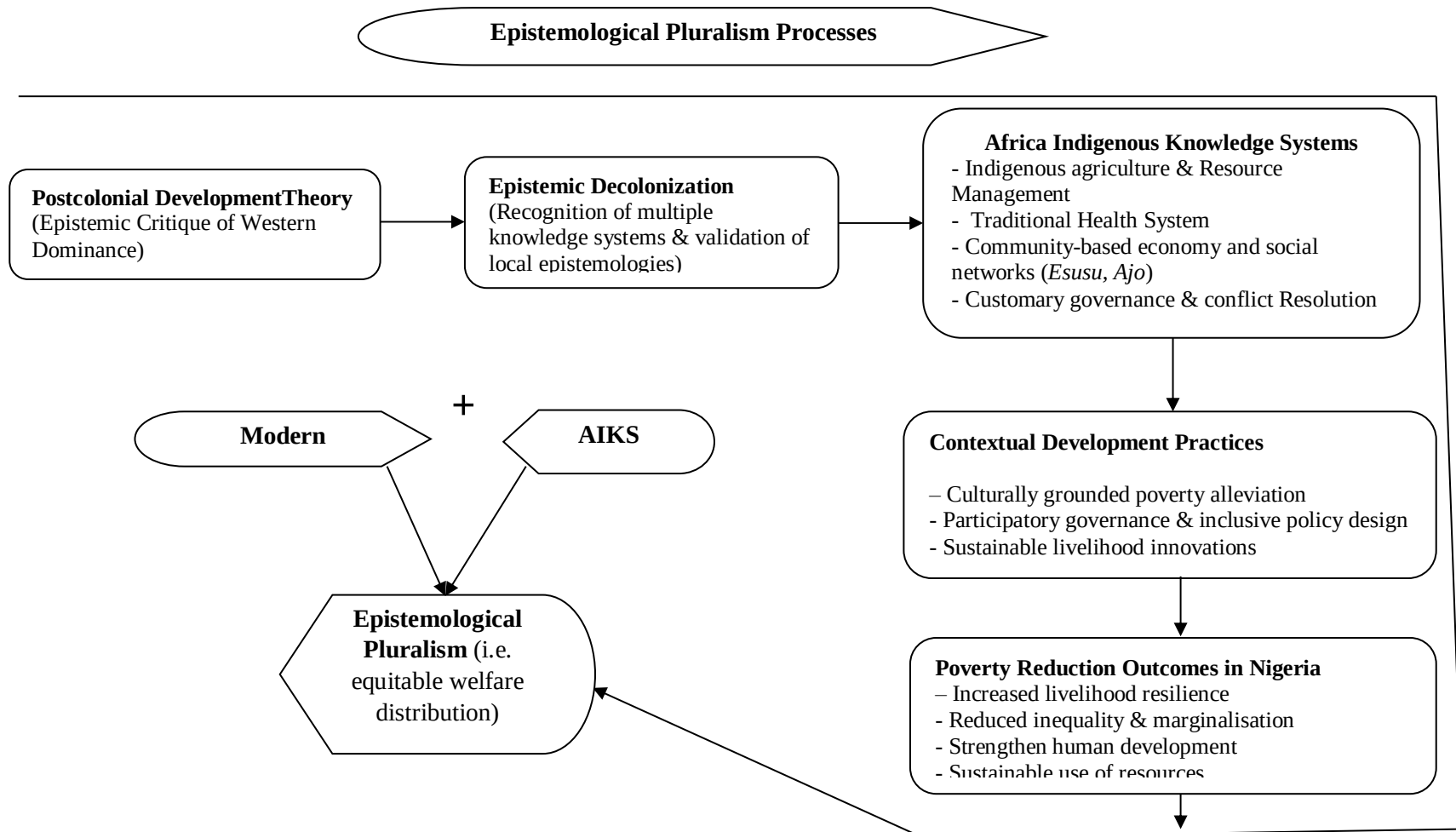


Figure 2: Epistemological Pluralism (equitable welfare distribution) Framework
Source: Author

Figure 2 explains that integrating indigenous knowledge into the science creates way for poverty reduction through equitable welfare distribution. Hence, the framework agrees with philosophy of Wiredu (1996) who argues for universality and particularity that both must co-exist. He said: “Human beings cannot live by particulars or universals alone, but by some combination of both” (P.9).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Methodological Approach

This study adopts a qualitative methodological approach that integrates multiple sources of evidence to examine the role of indigenous knowledge systems in poverty reduction. First, a document analysis was conducted on relevant national policy frameworks, including Nigeria’s National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA), in order to identify policy objectives, implementation strategies, and underlying assumptions regarding poverty alleviation. Second, a systematic content synthesis was undertaken using ethnographic accounts and peer-reviewed academic studies that document indigenous practices related to livelihoods, resource management, and community-based economic activities. This synthesis enabled the extraction of recurring themes and mechanisms through which indigenous knowledge contributes to poverty reduction. Finally, a comparative analytical reflection was employed to contrast indigenous approaches with formal, state-led poverty alleviation strategies, allowing for an assessment of complementarities, gaps, and contextual effectiveness between the two approaches.

Additionally, the paper engaged in a comparative reflection between indigenous knowledge and formal poverty alleviation approaches, examining how each conceptualises welfare, community participation, and sustainability. This

comparative lens provided the basis for evaluating the epistemological and practical gaps between imported development models and locally grounded alternatives. Through this triangulated qualitative approach, the study builds an interpretive framework that situates IK as both a cultural resource and a strategic pathway for rethinking poverty reduction in Nigeria. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to uncover contextual meanings, social interpretations, and cultural practices rather than test predefined hypotheses. Data were drawn from documentary sources and secondary literature, allowing for a reflective and interpretive analysis of how indigenous systems intersect with formal development policies.

4. Empirical Dimension of Indigenous Knowledge in Nigeria Poverty Alleviation

The IK in Nigeria manifests through deeply rooted practices that integrate ecological wisdom, social solidarity, and cultural ethics. These knowledge systems are not residual traditions but living mechanisms for survival and development, shaped by centuries of adaptation to ecological, political, and economic realities. Four domains are especially relevant to understanding the developmental potential of indigenous knowledge - agriculture, economic and social networks, health systems, and governance/conflict resolution.

4.1.1 Indigenous Agricultural Systems

Indigenous agricultural systems in Nigeria embody a sophisticated understanding of ecological balance, soil fertility, and sustainable production. Smallholder farmers, who constitute over 70% of the rural workforce, rely on practices such as mixed cropping, intercropping, fallowing, crop rotation, and indigenous pest control (Altieri, 2004a; Agrawal, 1995). These systems enhance biodiversity and reduce vulnerability to climatic shocks, offering models of resilience that modern industrial agriculture often overlooks.

In the savannah regions, for instance, traditional millet and sorghum farmers employ *zai pits* and organic mulching to conserve water and restore degraded soils (Reij, Tappan, & Smale, 2009). Similarly, yam farmers in the Middle Belt maintain sacred groves and crop diversity as a cultural and ecological safeguard against crop failure (Okigbo, 1982). These practices reflect an intimate understanding of the local ecosystem, what Odora-Hoppers (2002) describes as “*experiential science*” embedded in cultural life.

Moreover, indigenous seed exchange systems and communal labour groups (*owo*, *gayya*) serve as informal institutions for knowledge transmission and social cohesion. Despite the dominance of externally driven agricultural modernization programmes such as the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA), these indigenous systems continue to demonstrate higher adaptability and lower input dependency. Empirical studies indicate that such practices contribute significantly to household food security and income stability among rural poor populations (Emeagwali & Shizha, 2016; Oguamanam, 2006).

4.1.2 Indigenous Economic and Social Networks

Indigenous economic networks in Nigeria provide vital social safety nets and redistributive mechanisms that complement or substitute formal welfare institutions. Systems such as rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs) – known locally as *esusu*, *ajo*, or *adashe* – exemplify community-based financial innovation grounded in trust, reciprocity, and social accountability (Ardener, 1995; Hewavitharana, 1996; Ojo, 2013; Nwankwo & Aremu, 2020). These informal finance institutions enable members to mobilise savings, access credit, and invest in small enterprises without collateral, thereby supporting livelihoods and poverty alleviation.

Beyond financial systems, indigenous cooperative labour arrangements such as *owe* among the Yoruba, *gayya* among the Hausa, and *ndim* among the Igbo embody the principles of collective production and mutual assistance (Olawoye, 1996). They ensure that resource-poor farmers, widows, and vulnerable groups can access labour and resources during critical agricultural seasons. The embedded moral economy – based on solidarity, trust, and moral obligation – contrasts sharply with the competitive individualism of the market economy (Polanyi, 1944; Dei, 2012).

In urban and peri-urban settings, informal markets, traditional guilds and women’s trading networks have similarly provided adaptive spaces for entrepreneurship and social insurance, especially where formal financial institutions exclude the poor. These indigenous social economies function as resilience infrastructures, sustaining millions of Nigerians amidst systemic poverty and economic volatility (Eboh, 2019; Meagher, 2010).

4.1.3 Traditional Health Knowledge

In regions with poor health infrastructure, traditional medicine remains the primary healthcare source for over 80% of Nigerians (WHO, 2022) underscoring its accessibility and cultural legitimacy. Indigenous healers utilise local pharmacopoeia and community-based preventive care, an affordable and accessible health poverty-reducing mechanism. Hence, traditional health knowledge (THK) constitutes a vital component of Nigeria’s indigenous knowledge systems (NIKS). The NTHK integrates herbal medicine, spiritual healing and preventive health practices based on generations of observation and experimentation (Sofowora, 2008).

Traditional healers possess deep ethnobotanical knowledge, identifying medicinal plants, dosages and treatment combinations for conditions ranging from malaria to hypertension (Iwu,

2014). In communities across southwestern and southeastern Nigeria, traditional birth attendants and herbalists operate within networks of communal accountability and apprenticeship, ensuring intergenerational continuity of therapeutic knowledge (Abdullahi, 2011).

However, the integration of traditional medicine into national health policy remains limited, though the Nigerian government's *Traditional Medicine Policy Framework (2007)* and the *Nigerian Natural Medicine Development Agency (NNMDA)* represent important steps toward recognition. Beyond healthcare delivery, traditional health knowledge also embodies indigenous epistemologies of wellness that emphasize balance between human, spiritual, and ecological realm - a concept absent in biomedical paradigms (Odora-Hoppers, 2002). Strengthening this sector can therefore bridge health inequality gaps and localise medical innovation, particularly in rural and low-income communities.

4.1.4 Governance and Conflict Resolution

Indigenous governance systems (IGS) in Nigeria are anchored in communal participation, consensus-building and restorative justice. Traditional councils (*obaship*, *emirates*, *age-grade systems* as well as village councils, elders and chiefs) serve as custodians of social order, mediating disputes, welfare mediation and managing communal resources (Afigbo, 1972; Nwolise, 2005). These systems, based on consensus and moral authority, offer lessons for participatory governance models. As such, decision-making is typically participatory, involving open dialogue and consultation in forums such as the *Igbo village assembly (ama ala)* or the *Yoruba council of elders (igbimo agba ilu)*. In my hometown, it is called *Agba Ilu* (the Agbado-in-Council).

These institutions embody what Wiredu (1996) terms "consensual democracy," an indigenous model of governance that prioritises social

harmony and accountability over adversarial competition. Conflict resolution emphasises reconciliation and community reintegration rather than punitive retribution, reflecting African humanist philosophies such as *ubuntu* and *omoluwabi* (Menkiti, 2004).

Empirical evidence from rural Nigeria indicates that indigenous mechanisms remain more trusted and accessible than formal courts for resolving land, marital, and intergroup disputes (Chukwuemeka & Eze, 2011). They also play critical roles in resource governance, environmental conservation, and peace-building, functions increasingly recognised by development agencies seeking context-sensitive governance models (UNDP, 2020).

Hence, these systems demonstrate that indigenous governance is not merely cultural heritage but an operational framework for local accountability, conflict mediation, and social cohesion, operating as key elements for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Further empirical studies show that Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) have played a demonstrable role in poverty reduction efforts in Nigeria. For example, the cultivation of indigenous fruits and vegetables has enabled rural households to generate income and improve food self-sufficiency through sales in local markets, thereby enhancing livelihoods and reducing vulnerability to poverty in Ondo State communities (Olowo et al., 2022). Similarly, research on smallholder farmers shows that traditional practices such as crop rotation and water management are widely perceived as effective for agricultural production, contributing to food security and economic stability among resource-poor farmers (Olawuyi et al., 2024). Indigenous water management techniques in rural Central Nigeria also support essential domestic and agricultural activities, highlighting how traditional environmental knowledge contributes

to sustainable resource access and economic opportunities (Kana et al., 2025). Overall, indigenous knowledge has been linked to improved food security, income generation, and sustainable resource use being the key elements of poverty reduction especially where formal systems are limited (Aluko, 2018).

A study in Kaduna State, Nigeria, explored traditional methods for treating trypanosomiasis in animals. Researchers surveyed 200 livestock farmers and traders, identifying various plants used to treat the disease, often in combination. The most commonly used plants included *Adansonia digitata*, *Terminalia avicennoides*, and *Khaya senegalensis*, among others. The study also examined how these plants are prepared and administered to animals, shedding light on local indigenous knowledge for managing trypanosomiasis (Atawodi et al. 2002).

4.1.5 Synthesis of the four Domains

Across these four domains, IK functions as a multidimensional development resource, integrating ecological, social and moral rationalities as embodied in Wiredu (1996) philosophy. The empirical evidence supports the theoretical claim of PDT, that knowledge hierarchies, rather than knowledge deficiencies, perpetuate Africa's poverty paradox. Re-centering these indigenous systems within Nigeria's development policy architecture can therefore generate epistemically just and socially sustainable pathways out of poverty.

4.2 Discussions

This study's findings are situated within the theoretical frame of Postcolonial Development Theory (PDT) ((Escobar, 1995; Sachs, 2010), which critiques the dominance of Western epistemologies in African development thought. Our analysis reveals that poverty in Nigeria is not just an economic issue, but an epistemological condition rooted in the exclusion of local

knowledge systems. By recognising AIKS as legitimate and coequal epistemic frameworks, we can advance epistemic decolonisation and restore intellectual sovereignty to African societies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018)). Thus, the study has theoretical implications. The study highlights the need for an epistemic shift in poverty reduction approaches, emphasising the importance of indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems. This requires a reframing of poverty as a cognitive injustice, where local innovations and community-based knowledge are valued and integrated into policymaking. The theoretical implication is that sustainable poverty reduction in Nigeria requires a shift from imposed Western epistemologies to indigenous knowledge systems (Odora-Hoppers, 2002; Dei, 2012; de Sousa Santos, 2014).).

Furthermore, the conceptual insights of the study emphasises indigenous knowledge. The conceptual framework demonstrates how Indigenous Knowledge operates as a multidimensional development system, encompassing ecological, technological, socioeconomic, institutional, and cultural-spiritual dimensions. IK-based development emphasises human relationships, balance and sustainability, providing a context-sensitive approach to development that aligns with local priorities and cultural logics. More specific, the empirical findings demonstrate that IKS is already functioning as endogenous development infrastructures across Nigeria, in areas such as Agriculture. The local practices like intercropping and crop rotation have sustained productivity and biodiversity (Altieri, 2004a; Reij et al., 2009; Akinbile, 2018)... While the structural economic system somewhat hostile, the indigenous savings and cooperative systems (esusu, ajo, etc.) operate as informal welfare mechanisms that is helpful to reduce poverty among the rural dwellers (Ardener, 1995; Hewavitharana, 1996; Ojo, 2013; Nwankwo & Aremu, 2020).

Also, the traditional medicine remains a main source of healthcare for rural Nigerians, offering culturally legitimate and cost-effective alternatives. Fakhri, Perbawati, & Monalisa. (2022). Sofowora, 2008; Qi, 2013; Hoenders et al., 2024). The indigenous institutions ensure participatory decision-making and social cohesion through consensus and restorative justice. The communal justice has been stabilising local societies due to various social groups capable to control social crisis without reaching the structural court of justice. Hence, these findings illustrate that IK is a living epistemology that can complement formal development structures and generate inclusive growth. By institutionalising IK, we can create a more sustainable and equitable development paradigm for Nigeria (Nwoli, 2005)... Finally, collectively, these study illustrate that IK is not a pre-modern relic but a living epistemology that continues to sustain millions of Nigerians amidst state fragility and market volatility. When appropriately institutionalised, these systems can complement formal development structures and generate inclusive growth (Wiredu, 1996).

5. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated in answering the question: Can African Indigenous Knowledge salvage Nigeria's poverty crisis? This qualitative study captures the conceptual, theoretical frame and integrates multiple sources of evidence to examine the role of indigenous knowledge systems in poverty reduction. A document analysis was conducted on relevant national policy frameworks, including Nigeria's National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA). Data were drawn from documentary sources and secondary literature, allowing for a reflective and interpretive analysis of how indigenous systems intersect with formal development policies... Hence, the study shows that the paradox of poverty amidst plenty in Nigeria is rooted not merely in economic inequality but in epistemological dislocation, the alienation of

indigenous knowledge from development policy. Anchored on PDT, the qualitative of the paper shows that AIKS offer credible and sustainable alternatives to externally driven poverty alleviation imported models. Previous literature evidence across agriculture, economy, health, and governance reveals that these indigenous systems possess embedded logics of sustainability, inclusivity and social justice that are essential for authentic development.

However, institutional neglect and lack of documentation have undermined its potential. Modern education systems marginalise indigenous epistemologies, reinforcing dependency on foreign models (Ashworth & Cloate, 2022; Odora-Hoppers, 2002).

To salvage Nigeria's poverty crisis, knowledge pluralism, recognising the complementarity between scientific and indigenous systems, is imperative. Also, development must be epistemically decolonised, reclaiming the validity of indigenous knowledge as a foundation for innovation, governance, and social transformation. Integrating these systems into national development architecture will not only enhance poverty reduction outcomes but also restore cultural confidence, social cohesion and ecological balance with effect on security, and economic growth.

Finally, the study equally conclude that the path toward an equitable and sustainable Nigeria lies not in rejecting modernity but in harmonising it with the wisdom of IK, where development is defined socioeconomically and culturally by the people, for the people and from the people.

Policy Implications

The convergence of theoretical, conceptual, and empirical arguments from this paper underscores the need for a paradigm shift in Nigeria's poverty reduction strategy. For example, I hereby present four broad policy implications.

1. Epistemic Reorientation in Development Policy

Nigerian development frameworks should institutionalise indigenous knowledge as a formal input in planning, research, and implementation. This entails revising curricula in agricultural extension, health, and governance studies to integrate local epistemologies and participatory learning (Odora-Hoppers, 2002). At this juncture, it is imperative that the Federal and State Ministries of Education as well as education policymakers would need to have IK incorporated into curricula at all levels to cultivate context-sensitive innovation.

2. Institutional Integration and Hybrid Governance

Policies such as the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), and Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) should incorporate traditional institutions as local governance partners. This hybrid approach strengthens policy ownership, accountability, and sustainability at the grassroots level (UNDP, 2020). Hence, it becomes a necessity that the Federal and State Ministries of Agriculture to support indigenous soil conservation and seed preservation systems alongside mechanised farming.

3. Legal and Intellectual Property Protection for Indigenous Knowledge

Strengthening legal frameworks through agencies like the Nigerian Natural Medicine Development Agency (NNMDA) and the National Office for Technology Acquisition and Promotion (NOTAP) can ensure recognition and benefit-sharing for local innovators (Oguamanam, 2006). This will foster

innovation and incentivise the preservation of IKS. As a result, traditional medicine boards should be formalised to ensure quality control and complementarity with modern healthcare (Wiredu, 1996).

4. Community-Led Poverty Alleviation Programmes

Poverty reduction interventions should prioritise community participation and context specificity, leveraging indigenous social networks and cooperatives as delivery mechanisms for microcredit, agricultural support, and social protection (Meagher, 2010). Nigeria government should strengthen local councils and traditional leaders to deepen social accountability and equitable resource management. It will deepen community security that would transcend to strengthening national security. Specifically, the Nigeria government and financial operatives (e.g. CBN, BOI, etc.) should link traditional savings and investment schemes with Microfinance Banks in rural and semi-urban areas to empower low-income groups to foster a hybrid rural economy of AIKS.

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