

## AFRICAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND PHILOSOPHY

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### **Abstract**

*Philosophy, as a second order, is marked by critical reflections about reality. It is in this sense that philosophy is employed in this paper. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to critically examine and assess African indigenous knowledge systems in order to determine their validity and worthiness. We shall attempt to demonstrate successes achieved so far in the application of African traditional knowledge systems in attending to the problems of everyday life in Africa. We shall also try to expose their inadequacies and limitations and make some recommendations. The rest of this paper will conceptualize philosophy and African indigenous knowledge. Thereafter, it will critically explore some African indigenous knowledge systems and finally draw a conclusion.*

**Keywords:** African, Indigenous, Knowledge, Philosophy, System

### **Introduction**

African philosophy was initially faced with the challenge of establishing its own unique systems of knowing in the light of Africa's colonial legacy (Higgs, 2010). The introduction of Western education in the wake of colonialism and missionary excursions in Africa brought to the fore the idea of cultural imperialism which was designed to denigrate and desecrate some African indigenous knowledge systems by regarding them as primitive, superstitious, and heathen. The employment of these pejorative terms to denigrate African indigenous knowledge systems within Western thought stemmed from the assumption that Africa was a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) until Europeans arrived (Ntuli, 2009).

Africa was described as granary of ignorance and a 'dark continent' that was bereft of its own history, culture, and self-defining memories (Achebe, 1988). Thus, during The Great Debate on the existence, scope, and nature of African philosophy, which raged on the seventies and eighties, the questions of what it means to be 'an African', 'a philosopher' in an African context, as well as adjective 'African' in the phrase 'African Philosophy' were raised and articulated

in an attempt to establish a unique African systems of knowledge in response to denigration of African traditional knowledge systems by the West.

Several schools of thought in African philosophy, which attempt to classify different results of philosophical reflections in Africa under distinct trends, have emerged as a result of the Great Debate, all geared towards articulating various issues pertaining to the content and method of African philosophy (Nwala, 2004). The question of authenticity of African philosophy also involves an epistemological question as to whether there is an African way of knowing, given that epistemology is one of the main branches of philosophy. Thus, in modern and contemporary periods, socio-political African philosophy is developed to articulate authentic African culture and tradition which involve African traditional knowledge systems.

Philosophy, as a second order, is marked by critical reflections about reality. It is in this sense that philosophy is employed in this paper. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to critically examine and assess African indigenous knowledge systems in order to determine their validity and worthiness. We shall attempt to demonstrate successes achieved so far in the application of African traditional knowledge systems in attending to the problems of everyday life in Africa. We shall also try to expose their inadequacies and limitations and make some recommendations. The rest of this paper will conceptualize philosophy and African indigenous knowledge. Thereafter, it will critically explore some African indigenous knowledge systems and finally draw a conclusion.

### **Concept of Indigenous Knowledge**

Indigenous knowledge has been perceived differently by different scholars, depending on their orientations and life experiences. Purcell (1998) views indigenous knowledge as the body of historically constituted knowledge that is essential for long-term adaptation of a community or human groups to the biophysical environment. It relates to the manner in which human persons have understood themselves in relation to their natural environment.

According to World Bank (2004, as cited in Masoga & Kaya, 2012, p. 22), indigenous knowledge involves “skills, innovations, experiences and insights of people in their respective local communities, accumulated over years and applied to maintain or improve their livelihoods. For Akena (2012, p. 601), it is “a complex accumulation of local context-relevant knowledge that embraces the

essence of ancestral knowing as well as the legacies of diverse histories and cultures.

The above definitions lend credence to the fact that indigenous knowledge cannot be disconnected from social, cultural, spiritual, political, and economic realities of the indigenous people. For Kincheloe (2006), indigenous knowledge is a multidimensional body of understandings viewed by European culture as inferior, primitive, and superstitious especially in the wake of the European scientific revolution of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

Mammo (1996, p. 16) refers indigenous knowledge as “a set of ideas, beliefs and practices (some of which have indigenous religious underpinnings) of a specific locale that has been used by its people to interact with their environment and other people over a long period of time.” In this regard, it is used to describe ontological (aesthetic and ethical), spiritual, and social values of a society or community. For instance, “many communities teach their members about beliefs, practices related to plant growth, human nutrition, child bearing, pregnancy, food preparation and preservation, medicine, animal husbandry, and others.” (Mawere, 2015, p. 62).

African indigenous knowledge can therefore be defined as a lived world constituting Africans’ experiences, insights, and reasoning which embody their ways of knowing that enable them make their homes in a local style and for their continual existence and sustenance (Akena, 2012). It serves as a viable tool for reclaiming Africans’ context-relevant modes of knowing which have been devalued and branded often as anachronistic, primitive, inferior and superstitious by Western scholars (Akena, 2012). African indigenous knowledge, otherwise known as African traditional knowledge, refers to knowledge systems embedded in cultural traditions of Africans which include knowledge of beings/forces, universe, ecosystems, human relationships, traditional medicines, traditional technologies, time, divinity/divinities, and so forth. For Owusu-Ansah and Mji (2003), it is “experiential knowledge based on a worldview and a culture that is basically relational” This worldview, for them, is characterized by harmony, wholeness and community. Supporting this view, Sarpong (2002) states that African worldview, as it pertains to harmony and wholeness is rooted in a collective sense of responsibility. Therefore, African indigenous knowledge with its method of acquisition has a collective, social, interpersonal, and practical slant (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013).

African indigenous knowledge systems become therefore a systematic body of knowledge acquired by Africans through “the accumulation of experience, informal experiments and intimate understanding of their natural and cultural environment (World Bank, 2004, as cited in Atebe et al, 2012, p. 69). African indigenous knowledge enables Africans to maintain their ancestral environment and systems as people and communities with distinct languages, cultures, and worldviews. Forms of African indigenous knowledge are predominantly intuitive knowledge, common sense knowledge, mystical knowledge, inferential knowledge, oral tradition, and holistic knowledge (Ndubisi, 2015, as cited in Ndubisi, 2019).

### **Concept of Philosophy**

Etymologically, the term ‘philosophy’ is a combination of Greek words *philein* or *philo* which means love, and *sophia* which means wisdom. The collocation of these two words therefore means ‘the love of wisdom’. It is a rational search for wisdom, truth, and ultimate reality. Basically, philosophy is classified into two, namely, first order philosophy and second order philosophy. As a first order, philosophy can be defined as a world view (*Weltanschauung*) or an ideology (the dominant belief) of a people which may or may not be systematically formulated. It is a popular culture representing “set of beliefs in which an outlook on the world is founded, and from which the motives of human action may be drawn (Scruton, 1994, p. 353). Philosophy, in this sense, is therefore the supreme beliefs, values and attitudes that shape human thoughts, choices and actions, and underpin societal policies and practices. The dominant beliefs may be metaphysical, epistemological, ethical (or moral), aesthetic, and so forth (Agbakoba, 2009).

The second order philosophy is a philosophy in a formal or technical sense. In this sense, it means a critical reflective activity which aims at examining and evaluating beliefs, ideas, systems, and so forth from an objective and impartial point of view in order to arrive at a conclusion that satisfies the questioning and critical mind. In this regard, Omeregbe (1990, p. 22) views philosophy as “a rational search for answers to the questions that arise in the mind when we reflect on human experience.” Sodipo (as cited in Asiegbu, 1988, p. 307) conceives philosophy as “reflective and critical thinking about the concepts and principles we use to organize our experience in morals, in religions, in social and political life, in law, in psychology, in history and in the natural sciences.” The role of philosophy in this regard is to “examine the intellectual foundations of

our life, using the best modes of knowledge and reflection for human well-being" (Wiredu, as cited in Oladipo, 1996, p. 27)

Philosophy, as a critical reflective activity, is a search for truth which is discovered within a certain social practice. This truth in turn transforms and enriches the practice (Agbakoba, 2009). Hence, such a critical reflective activity is not carried out in a vacuum but is done within socio-political and cultural milieu which is the subject of study. A philosopher can discover truth through constructive criticisms of forces of change and generation of new ideas which will at the end contribute to the transformation of a society for good. By extension, African philosophy, conceived as a second order philosophy, is a critical reflection by Africans on their experiences of reality. It is in this formal sense that philosophy is employed in this paper.

### **A Critical Study of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

This section critically discusses some African indigenous knowledge systems such as vital forces, communalism, traditional medicines, ecosystems and water managements, and traditional technologies.

#### **On Vital Forces: Towards African Mode of Knowing**

In pristine African society, all beings - God, humans (living or dead), animals, plants and minerals - are ontologically constituted by force. Though Placide Tempels, who was the first scholar to document African systematic tradition, presents Bantu (an African community) ontology as an embodiment of African ontology and thus his work has been criticized for not typifying the philosophy of the entire African continent, it is widely held by some African communities like the Igbo people of Nigeria and Dogon people of Mali (Griaule, 1965) that the interaction of forces is the basis of Africans' mode of apprehension of reality. Tempels (1959) states that, for the Bantu, vital force is a necessary element in being; the concept of being cannot be divorced from the concept of force. He even takes the notion of force to extremes by equating force with being. As he puts it: "Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force" (Tempels, 1959, p. 24). All human beings are linked in the chain of vital force interacting with and influencing one another. The universe is the network of diverse forces. The vital force manifests itself in every living human body and can be increased or diminished (Senghor, 1965) by a higher force. Hence, Tempels (1959, p. 29) writes that "nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider's web which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network."

An African has an intimate ontological relationship with other beings (forces) and his life is inextricably interwoven with them. A bond between an African and the other created beings is analogous to a causal tie that binds all creatures and the Creator, God – the Supreme Force that gives vital force to all other beings and unites the universe. Tempels (1959) outlines the hierarchy of beings/forces as follows:

- i. God/Creator: He is the source of vital force. He gives existence, power of survival and of increase to other forces.
- ii. Progenitors/Ancestors: They are founders of different clans. They are the first to whom God communicates his vital force with the power of exercising their influences on all posterity. They constitute the most important chain binding men to God. They are not regarded as ordinary dead but spiritualized beings. They possess spiritual reinforcing influences on the living.
- iii. The Elders: They form a link with the ancestors through whom they reinforce the life of the descendants and all inferior forces or beings. They bind ancestors and their descendants together.
- iv. The Descendants: They are those on whom the ancestors exercise their influences with the collaboration of the eldest of each clan.
- v. Inferior Forces: They include animals, plants, and minerals. The living exercise control over them. Inferior forces basically exist for the purpose of being utilized to increase the vital forces of the living.

According to Senghor (1965), this understanding of being and nature underlies the African's relationship with other beings. Life force is seen as a binding force that unites all existent and informs reciprocal relations among individuals. In the light of this, Ekei (2001, p. 194) states:

The fundamental assumption of African philosophy is that every existing thing or reality is a life force, or reality is a life force, or that every reality possesses its life force. In other words, everything has something in common by virtue of life force. Following this onto-ethical presupposition, man seems to find humanity in the being of another, which helps his disposition to share, to care and to accept.

Thus, to understand reality in African system of thought is to have a holistic view of a society structured by harmonious co-existence between all beings (Wane, 2005). Senghor (1965) differentiates between European and African apprehension of being. The European distances himself from the object: he views

it, analyzes it, kills it, and uses it. On the contrary, the African neither analyzes nor distances himself from the object. Rather, he is deeply, passionately and mysteriously engaged with the object. He is at one with the rhythm of the object or the *Other* (Senghor, 1965). He embraces and feels the object, and by the power of his emotion, the reason of the touch, the embrace, transcends the visible to the underlying reality of the object in order to grasp the reality beneath the sign (Senghor, 1965). The African is driven by the essence of the object rather than the external aspect of the object (Masolo, 1994). So, in Senghor's perspective, the relationship of the European to the *Other* can be said to be analytical and practical - he analyzes what he discovers in order to utilize it. His mode of knowledge does not "attain the innermost nature of things" (Abanuka, 2011, p. 84). However, the African's relationship to the object is one of communion and participation. He is intuitive by participation. He synthesizes what he discovers to grasp the essence of reality in its concreteness, originality, and interconnectedness. In other words, through intuitive discovery and synthesis, he determines the essence of things and their relation to one another. Thus, the reasoning of the African, for Senghor, is intuitive and sympathetic, while that of the European is discursive and analytic. The African reasoning is intuitive by participation, while that of the European is analytic by utilization (Senghor, 1956, as cited in Masolo, 1994).

### **On African Communalism**

The intuitive reasoning of the African forms the basis of African ontology and worldview (Abanuka, 2011). It is this intuitive reasoning that underlies Senghor's African socialism which, for him, is quite distinct from European version of socialism. Accordingly, Senghor (1965) views negritude - African traditional worldview, values and civilization - as the foundation of African socialism. For him, traditional African societies are socialist in character and community-based. The individual "dies to himself to be reborn in the *Other*. He does not assimilate, he is assimilated" (Senghor, 1965, p. 32). This means that he abandons himself, his I, so as to identify with the *Other* (the *Thou*) and thus he is made for the purpose of communal life.

A sense of community or brotherhood is therefore, for Senghor, the specific nature of traditional African societies. Arguing for the communitarian character of African societies, Senghor (1965) states that the African has a deep sense of solidarity which explains his spirit of dialogue (both intrapersonal and interpersonal), and harmonious living with others. Senghor explains that this harmony and the spirit of dialogue are made possible due to vital force upon

which everything is based. Nyerere (1964) sees *Ujamaa* as the basis of African socialism. *Ujamaa* is a Swahili word which literally means 'familyhood' or 'brotherhood'. Nyerere's idea of familyhood transcends the kingship ties with the extended family to encompass the whole of Africa and ultimately humanity at large. He claims that his brand of African socialism is aimed at human welfare, progress, and self-realization, and is a specific characteristic of traditional African societies, as opposed to capitalism which thrives on the exploitation of man by man. For Nyerere, socialism is an attitude of the mind "which consists in altruistic view of wealth" (Oguejiofor, 2004, p. 27). He explains that in traditional African societies wealth was acquired not for the purpose of gaining prestige or dominating others characteristic of capitalist society, but rather for the good of the community, for services to others.

Accordingly, Nyerere's socialism is based on the principle of cooperation and cooperative living. Nyerere (1964) asserts that every member of the society was a worker, contributing in the work that gave rise to the production of goods and thus everyone was mutually helpful. Goods were produced for the purpose of improving the wellbeing of humans (Okolo, 1993). Just as wealth found in the individual's hand was collectively owned, the means to it, predominantly land, was entrusted to the community that gave each member an access to its utilization (Nyerere, (1964). For him, there were no millionaires; no individual member of the society possessed wealth which exceeded that of the multitude of his fellow members put together. Senghor (1964, p. 240) writes that "the individual or the families within a tribe were 'rich' or 'poor' according to whether the whole tribe was rich or poor. There was an even distribution of what was produced which ensured justice, freedom, and security: "Nobody starved, either of food or of human dignity, because he lacked personal wealth; he could depend on the wealth possessed by the community of which he was a member (Nyerere, 1964, p. 240). Thus, traditional African societies were, for Nyerere, classless, castles, and egalitarian bereft of any form of injustice, class struggle, discrimination, and domination.

The idea of African communalism has been expiated upon, consolidated and defended by some contemporary African philosophers and scholars. Mbiti (1990) argues that the individual is a communitarian being since he is tied to the community by the communitarian bond. He is therefore an embodiment of others. He is a corporate entity that possesses universal character: "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am. The individual is united with the rest of his community both the living and the dead, and humanly speaking nothing can



separate him from this corporate society” (Mbiti, 1990, p. 113). Mbiti (1990) insists that the individual depends on the community for his existence and thus cannot exist in isolation from the community, for it is only in being-with the community that he attains full humanity. In the words of Mbiti (1990, p. 106): “In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual, for the individual depends on the corporate group.” Nze (1989) agrees with Mbiti that the individual in traditional African society is a universal and generic being whose existence is defined and determined by his community and thus cannot divorced himself from the community. As he puts it: “Nobody can detach himself from his community, for the community is the vehicle through which religion – the life wires of the people – is practised. Thus, to be human is to belong to the whole community (Nze, 1989, p. 6). Nze contends further:

There is one outstanding and prevailing notion of man in communalistic society. In a man one detects and locates other men and the entire community is discoverable in him. Man is therefore a generic being. The individual is elevated beyond his subjective individuality and it is necessary to recognize the universal in him. Even in his individuality, man is a concrete universal (1989, p. 8).

Buttressing the communitarian existence of the individual, Ezekwonna (2005) argues that the individual must be seen as a single whole, an integral human person that needs the community to maintain his identity, attain selfhood, and fulfil his potential:

The issue is that a person (the individual) must be seen as a whole and not just as isolated individual who has his own different world from that of the others. The integral person (individual) needs an integral community where his thinking ability will have meaning for him and those around him. In this community he experiences a reciprocal acknowledgement of the individual person. He realises what it means to be human in real terms through person to person relationships in the community (Ezekwonna, 2005, p. 67).

Therefore, for Ehusani (1991, p. 148), “it is through being rooted in an ongoing community that the individual comes to see himself or herself as a person. The

individual's identity makes no sense except in reference to the community." Gyekye (1998) contends that the individual within the community has the ability to express his own judgement and re-evaluate communal goals, values, and practices. This suggests that individual autonomy and communal values are not mutually exclusive. Gyekye (1998, p. 27) explicates thus:

By autonomy, I do not mean self-completeness, but the having of will, a rational will of one's own, that enables one to determine at least some of one's own goals and to pursue them. The communitarian self, then, cannot be held as a cramped or shackled self acting robotically at the beck and call of the communal structure. That structure is never to be conceived as, or likened to, the Medusa head the sight of which reduces a person to inactivity and supineness....

Appiah (1994, as cited in Letsa, 2000) maintains this position when he asserts that communal values such as cooperation, solidarity, reciprocity, kindness, generosity, and sharing do not violate the liberal principles of human rights. Supporting this view, Ezekwonna (2005) hold that communalistic nature of traditional African societies does not mean that individual autonomy is being utterly swallowed up by the community. Rather, the community creates an enabling condition for the individual to assert himself and make choice. In his words: "In fact, the community structures cannot elude the reality and quality of self-assertiveness which individuals show through their actions. It is this capacity to assert oneself in the community that makes possible the intelligibility of an individual's autonomous choice of goals and plans for his life" (2005, p. 148). According to Mwinzi (2015, p. 6), communalism as an "aspect of indigenous knowledge system which enhances group cohesion against unnecessary individualism and competition." Naamwintome and Miller (2015) explain that Africans have common elements in the way they know and organize themselves which are strongly demonstrated in their indigenous knowledge systems and values, despite their ethnic and religious differences. Explaining the communalistic aspect of African indigenous knowledge, Mosha (2000, p. 11) states African indigenous knowledge is:

An intrinsic unity between the individual and the community. In their everyday lives, indigenous Africans try to strike a balance between one's collective identity as a member of a society and one's personal identity as a unique individual. This consciousness helps indigenous people to continually struggle against rugged individualism on the one

hand and communism (loss of individual identity and rights) on the other hand. To avoid these two dangers African societies strive to undertake and define a person in the context of community that in turn is understood and definable through its unique members.

According to Mbiti (1969, as cited in Ilmi, 2014, p. 146), community is “a living organism of interconnected, interrelated, and interpersonal, and interdependent holistic social relations. Each aspect of life is interconnected succinctly.” Therefore, African indigenous knowledge as it relates to communalism emphasizes that “all virtues of life are living holistically and they are integral to the universe (Ilmi, 2014, p. 146). Nyerere and Senghor claim that communitarian life is exclusive and specific to Africa and so essential to being Africa. Senghor even takes his position to extremes by distinguishing between European and African modes of knowing. For him, the African’s relationship with the *Other* is being marked by communication and participation in which the Africa is passionately and deeply engaged with the other beings, while that of the European is characterized by exploitation, domination, and utilization in which the European is indifferent, dispassionate, and distances himself from the *Other*. However, interpersonal relationships are not peculiar to Africa. Other philosophical traditions imbibe and enunciate such humanistic and communalistic ideas and ideals. Gabriel Marcel (1949), a French existentialist philosopher, for instance, holds that intersubjectivity, which involves participation, communion and affectivity, is an essential aspect of authentic human existence. For him, interpersonal relations are only possible in the world of mystery (or at the level of what he calls ‘secondary reflection’) where the subject is passionately involved in the whole range of being as an actor, rather a detached observer. This is diametrically opposed to the world of problem (the realm of primary reflection) where the individual is dispassionate, indifferent and detached observer of an event and does not participate in being. For Marcel, to be is to participate in being (*Esse est co-esse*), to engage oneself to the rest of being (Patka, 1962). Martin Buber (1958), a German-Jewish existentialist philosopher, follows Marcel in maintaining that real human existence consists in *I-Thou* relationship which involves a deep and mysterious engagement with the *Other* (the *Thou*). Here, the being of *I* belongs to both the *I* and the *Thou*. It is an interpersonal and shared relationship characterized by mutual respect and reciprocal love, as opposed to *I-It* relationship marked by detachment, tension, domination, and exploitation. Here, the being of *I* belongs to *I* alone. Emmanuel Levinas (1969; 1998), a French philosopher, stresses the philosophy of otherness

(*alterity*). He attempts to establish a metaphysical relationship that recognizes and respects the freedom and identity of the *Other*. It is a relationship of mutual recognition and respect, a relationship of *I* and *Thou* where the *I* does not destroy the *Other* and the *Other* does not destroy the *I*. This is contrary to totalizing relationship - a relation of dominance - where the *Other* is dissolved into the *I* or swallowed up by the *I*.

It is worth-stating that the attitude of communalism, just like individualism, is not ontologically concomitant with any community or society. It is not a static phenomenon exclusive to any human culture or people. Rather, it is a product of and reflection of socio-political and economic circumstances at a particular era which is subject to change. The attitude of communalism is bound to grow in a society where socio-political and economic hardship threatens its survival, whereas the individualistic attitude tends to grow in a society where there is enduring economic wellbeing as well as techno-scientific advancement (Oguejiofor, 2004). The prevailing socio-political and economic circumstances at a particular era determine whether a society tilts towards communalism or individualism. For instance, in this contemporary Africa, it cannot be rightly gainsaid that the sense of community and brotherhood is on the wane and there is a steady rise in individualism, on account of socio-political and economic changes marked by privatization of firms and industries - a hallmark of capitalism that encourages individualism. This sense of individualism created by private ownership of land and other means of production is now sustained in some African countries like Nigeria by estates and Government Reserved Areas (G.R.As) where "the individual fences in his house in high walls with equally intimidating gates and 'beware of dogs' signals to complete the shutting off of the community from the world of the individual" (Odimegwu, 2007, p. 6). It is therefore erroneous to think that communalism is exclusive to Africa or essential to being Africa.

Besides, Nyerere takes a highly romanticized view of pristine African societies by supposing that a sense of community or brotherhood implies socialism and thus contends that traditional African societies were bereft of any form of domination, exploitation, class, and private ownership of property. However, that a sense of familyhood/brotherhood and mutual solidarity existed in the society did not mean that it was a classless society and there was no private ownership of property. Gyekye (1997) and Oguejiofor (2004) disclose that the practice of ownership of property, including land, is as old as society itself and was only impracticable in societies where slaves were prohibited from owning private

property. For instance, in Igbo traditional society, “the rich had millions of yams, with long bans to preserve them. They had millions of compounds dotted with many houses, and peopled by as many wives as they could afford to marry” (Oguejiofor, 2004, p. 34). Nkrumah (1973) reveals that prior to colonization, feudalism and slavery existed in some parts African, and they involved deep and exploitative stratification founded on the ownership of land. It is unthinkable that currently exploitation, oppression, injustice, marginalization, uneven distribution of national wealth, widespread poverty, and dehumanization are rife in some African societies that were socialist in character as Nyerere claims.

Given that sense of community or brotherhood is a product of socio-political and economic conditions and it does not stifle individual autonomy and potential, it is plausible for Africans to be communitarian in character in the face of current gloomy economic realities and political upheavals in some African societies which threaten their survival. Such a harmony, mutual solidarity, and togetherness serve as a survival mechanism. In this regard, *Igwebuiké* philosophy employed by African traditional philosophers of complementary school of thought to discuss the nature of the observed African reality (Kanu, 2016) becomes relevant. *Igwebuiké* is an Igbo word or phrase which means ‘number is strength’ or ‘number is power’. It is equivalent to English word, complementarity. *Igwebuiké* is a “philosophy of harmonization, and complementation and how the world relates to one another in the most natural, mutual, harmonious and compatible ways of possible... it is a relational character of mutual relations (Kanu, 2017, p. 108). The idea of *igwebuiké* is founded on African communalism that is deeply rooted in the ontology of human person as a being who is intimately linked with other beings (forces) and is an integral part of the human community viewed as an organic whole. It is in being-with the community, in communion with others, that an African attains full humanity, self a realization.

The rationale behind *igwebuiké* philosophy is that when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they form a formidable and insurmountable force (Kanu, 2016, 2017). There is strength in unity; people are at their best when they are united. *Igwebuiké* philosophy has wide applicability and usefulness in this contemporary Africa characterized by injustice, oppression, exploitation, marginalization, and suppression of critical and dissenting voices. For instance, if the Niger Delta communities in Nigeria come together, present a united front, and press home their demands, they can have a good deal with Nigerian government and other petrobusiness actors that have impoverished the

communities through indiscriminate exploitation of oil in the region. Moreover, the Igbo people of Nigeria can negotiate their future with the government if they unite and speak with one voice.

### **On Traditional Medicines**

Traditional medicines can be defined as “the sum total of the knowledge, skill and practices based on theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness” (WHO, 2019, p. 8). The indigenous beliefs and experiences are handed down from one generation to another either verbally or in writing. According to a traditional medical practitioner, Osita Omera (as cited in Umeogu, 2012, p. 74), traditional medicine is “the medicine for the people and by the people.” This definition is apt, as it shows that is the medicine prepared by indigenous people for their own utilization. African medicines are organic drugs made mainly from plants or herbs for the treatment of various kinds of illnesses and for the general improvement of health conditions. In traditional African societies, life is seen as an organic whole. Health is a function of interaction of the individual with the social, cultural, and supernatural environment (Umeogu, 2012). A balance in the individual’s interaction within the environment brings about good health, while an imbalance in the interaction engenders ill health. African traditional medicines serve as organic or living drugs for the restoration of harmony or balance of life. Umeogu (2012) notes that traditional African medicine does not only possess the efficacy of treating the individual’s health problem, but also that of improving his wellbeing due to its organic dynamism and living functions. Thus, it has come to be accepted and patronized as most effective medicine for total wellness of the individual which is lacking in orthodox medicine.

There are recent studies that demonstrate that Africa has indigenous medicines and healing systems. For instance, Ateba, Kaya, Pitso & Ferim (2012) carried out a study of Batswana (a major African indigenous ethnic group in the North-West Province of South Africa) indigenous plant species for medicinal and food uses. A purposive sample involving 200 respondents (150 women and 50 men) was employed for the study. The methods of data collection were key informant interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations. The findings show that Batswana knowledge holders have a rich indigenous knowledge of plant species diversity of their environments as well as the uses of plant species for medicine, food and nutrition. Related to this is the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela (one of the ethnic groups in Batswana)’s indigenous healing systems. Ramobi and Matike (2012) conducted a case study of the indigenous healing system of this

ethnic group to examine healer-patient relationship. 100 respondents were selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were the core methods of data collection. The findings reveal that majority of the respondent community members consulted traditional healers for health care, and that respect, trust and confidentiality constitute the essential elements in patient-healer relationships.

In Nigeria, for instance, Rev. Fr. Prof. Bona Uchenna Umeogu, a Professor of Philosophy at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, produce traditional drugs which he calls “Metaphysico-Communal Living Drugs” (Umeogu, 2019, p. 90). They are mainly made from plants with active ingredients such as plant extracts, roots, leaves, seeds, leaf shoots and stems, stem bark, oil, and so forth. The living drugs are used for treatment of various diseases and ailments like typhoid, malaria, pneumonia, jaundice, headache fever, cold, syphilis, gonorrhoea, staphylococcus, lung, fever, kidney and heart problems, asthma, catarrh, cough, tuberculosis, poisons, menstrual irregularities and fertility problems of men and women, prostrate and cycle problems, epilepsy, blood vessel problems, mental disorder, stroke, fibroid, ulcer, diabetes, obesity, skin infections, hypertension, low blood pressure, memory problems, among others (Umeogu, 2019).

Moreover, traditional medicines have been developed in many Igbo communities by the traditional medical practitioners for the treatment of some injuries and illnesses such as fractured bones and muscles (orthopedic injuries), burns, wounds and cuts, spleen inflammation or enlargement of the spleen, measles and chicken box, *nsi/nshi* (spiritual poison sort of), bites (by scorpions and snakes) and mental disorder (Umeogu, 2012). The use of traditional medicines to treat the above-mentioned injuries and illnesses has proved to be a success. No doubt, the knowledge and use of plants and trees for medical treatments promote physical, psychological, social, and spiritual wellbeing of Africans. However, the major challenge facing the practice of the traditional medicine is the lack of state-of-the-art equipment needed for sterilization of drugs during production to make them safe for human consumption. There is therefore need to integrate African indigenous knowledge with modern knowledge and technological systems for sustainable development and for the improvement of the means of livelihood. Such integration will not harm the living force, the essence, of traditional medicines or vitiate its effectiveness, but rather improve the quality of health service delivery. Efforts should be made to document indigenous knowledge and make it available to the public, as well as incorporating it into the school curriculum at all levels of education. Besides,

there is need to protect the intellectual property rights of indigenous knowledge systems by developing appropriate legal and policy frameworks (Masoga & Kaya, 2012).

### **On Ecosystems and Water Managements**

Ecosystem involves all plants and animals that live in a particular area together within the complex relationship that exists between them and their environment. Recent studies demonstrate that Africa can manage and control their ecosystems as well as water systems. For instance, Kenalemang and Kaya (2012) conducted a research on Batswana indigenous natural disaster management systems using key informant interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations as methods of data collection. 180 respondents (100 women and 80 men) participated in a purposive sample for the study. The result indicates that African indigenous communities have rich natural disaster management. Maake and Maya (2012) also carried out a case study of Batswana indigenous water management systems. Qualitative research methods such as key informant interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations were main sources of data collection. 200 community members (120 men and 80 women) participated in the purposive sample for the study. The findings reveal that Africa indigenous communities have developed for long practical ways of managing water systems. The observation of the behaviour of various natural phenomena such as plants, animals, birds, insects, weathers and wind by Batswana can serve as the main source of information for detecting early warning indicators of looming natural disasters (Masoga & Kaya, 2012). Again, the indigenous water managements systems help to minimize the risk of crop failure, thereby increasing agricultural productivity. The system can also be used to fight against desertification and mitigate the deleterious effects of climate change on farmlands, especially where irrigation water is expensive or short in supply. Besides, the systems save energy and are cost-effective, compared to irrigation projects. The ability of Africans to control their ecosystems and manage their natural resources using indigenous knowledge systems ensures improved and sustained communities' livelihoods.

### **On Traditional Technologies**

Traditional technologies include machines, tools, equipment, and gadgets produced with predominantly local materials for the purpose of solving everyday societal problems and improving living conditions. Apart from the fact that Africa produces indigenous implements like machetes and cooking utensils such as knives, pots, spoons and trays, it is gradually making strides in other



home-grown technologies. Ilmi (2014) observes the creativity and ingenuity of Africans to utilize local resources to meet their development needs during his encounter with some young boys at Mombasa. The boys produced “magnificent battery-operated toys from scrap metal, wood, and neon lights” (Ilmi, 2014, pp. 142-143). Ilmi asserts that he was impressed with the handiwork of the boys as he watched them playing with the toys they made themselves. Besides, In July this year, 2019, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) unveiled first locally made electric car in Nigeria produced by the Mechatronic Research Group in the Faculty of Engineering. The coordinator of the group, Engr. Ozoemena disclosed that 80 percent of the components used in manufacturing the electric car were sourced from local materials (2019, as cited in Adibe, 2019).

There is need to restructure education system in Africa to incorporate African indigenous knowledge systems in the school curriculum at all levels of education. This will provide opportunities for engagement with African indigenous knowledge, for innovative thinking, and for harnessing the intellectual creativity of African learners in order to meet African development needs. African governments should promote African-made locally technologies and other products by developing and investing in human capital, especially in the sphere of engineering and technological innovation. Promotion of local development will bring about African development that is rooted in culture, values, philosophies, and social life of Africans, thus consolidating African indigenous knowledge systems.

Western scholars have viewed African indigenous knowledge from the prism of Western knowledge and science and thus delegitimized African indigenous knowledge as primitive, anachronistic, inferior, and superstitious (Kincheloe (2006). However, knowledge produced by individuals should be understood within the social existence of the individuals or groups. Mannheim (1936) maintains that there is a relationship between knowledge and existence and thus we must study the social circumstances and socio-cultural milieu within which knowledge has been conceived and produced in order to understand the knowledge. This means that the society and the individual who generate knowledge must be studied in order to bring out into the open the deeper meanings embedded and represented by the knowledge. Knowledge production is thus a function of social processes and structures as well as the pattern of intellectual life, including the modes of knowing, to respond to challenges of the community (Akena, 2012). Both natural and social scientists agree that all knowledge is human-centred or driven by human interests and therefore indigenous in various respects (Masolo, 2003).

Therefore, knowledge produced is legitimate when it is responsive to socio-cultural, political and economic interests and needs of a society in which it is created. Nevertheless, African indigenous knowledge systems must be open and flexible to constructive and necessary changes in keeping with the modernity in order to develop. The process of knowledge production and application should involve not only the use of ideas, tools and methods indigenous to Africans, but also the employment of Western concepts, tools and methodologies, where necessary and possible, to form an integrated whole especially when African ideas, tools and methods are handicapped like in the case of a locally manufactured electric car by UNN that involved 20 percent of foreign materials.

It calls for mutual exchange and synthesis of ideas and knowledge in a manner that does not denigrate good socio-cultural values and ideals. Western science and knowledge should not be discarded in the process of indigenizing knowledge and science in Africa, but rather what is viable in them should be employed to add value and enhance the process of knowledge creation and application within the context of African socio-cultural norms, values and practices, for no knowledge or idea is absolutely divorced from all other human knowledge, culture, and experiences. For example, “the western education system is a hybrid of different knowledge, adopted through European global expansion, to enrich our learning in formal educational setting” (Akena, 2012, p. 599). Even Wiredu (2005) who is critical of western education in Africa asserts that it would be unwise to reject all potentially positive things from the West. On the whole, what Africa needs to secure the future of its traditional knowledge systems and African philosophy in general is to integrate its indigenous knowledge systems with what is valid, viable and good in knowledge systems of other continents or nations, while retaining its good cultural and social ideals and values.

### **Conclusion**

We have demonstrated in this paper that Africa has its own knowledge systems. We have shown some considerable success achieved so far as well as challenges facing Africa in the knowledge production. We have also made some recommendations for each form of African traditional knowledge discussed. The position of this paper is that Africa’s future should be built on African knowledge systems in particular and African philosophy in general. *Igwebuiké* philosophy, which we have explained in this paper, should be the heart of African thought and mode of existence. Professor Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, whose philosophy is *igwebuiké*, has been at the forefront of the campaign for the

development and promotion of *igwebuike* philosophy through his numerous writings. When this way of doing philosophy is central to African societies, Africans can be rest assured that their multifaceted challenges will be met. Accordingly, African indigenous knowledge systems should serve as the basis of a legitimate idea of development that is historically relevant, socially meaningful, and responsive to the needs, interests and aspirations of African people (Hountondji, 2005). Every culture or society has its own way of thinking, reasoning, and knowing informed by its needs, interests, and goals. The starting and focal point of development is therefore an engaged and critical understanding and mastery of the African local resources – the ability to harness, manage, and transform available resources for the improvement of the conditions and the quality of life. Beyond this, African indigenous knowledge should be integrated with western science and knowledge, where possible and necessary, to make it rationally inclusive, objectively strong, and universally valid, while remaining locally grounded, after all sciences that make universal claims are local knowledge systems (Harding, 1997).

Africans should be open to innovations, for no human culture is completely divorced from others. Knowledge is a shared process and thus Africa can borrow from other cultural knowledge and experiences to improve its system of knowledge production and development paradigm. Beyond this, African indigenous knowledge systems should be incorporated in the school curriculum at all levels of education. Finally, there is need for continuous engagement with and critical discourse on African indigenous knowledge systems as well as documentation and publication of research findings on African indigenous knowledge in order to see how it can be utilized to fashion an African-centred development paradigm.

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