

DECOLONIZING KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION PRACTICE: CRITICAL PATHWAYS FOR GOVERNANCE, PEACE, AND SECURITY RESEARCH IN AFRICA

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Launched in March 2012, the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) supports independent African research on conflict-affected countries and neighboring regions of the continent, as well as the integration of high-quality African research-based knowledge into global policy communities. In order to advance African debates on peacebuilding and promote African perspectives, the APN offers competitive research grants and fellowships, and it funds other forms of targeted support, including strategy meetings, seminars, grantee workshops, commissioned studies, and the publication and dissemination of research findings. In doing so, the APN also promotes the visibility of African peacebuilding knowledge among global and regional centers of scholarly analysis and practical action and makes it accessible to key policymakers at the United Nations and other multilateral, regional, and national policymaking institutions.

ABOUT THE SERIES

The APN Lecture Series provides an avenue for influential thinkers, practitioners, policy makers, and activists to reflect on and speak to the critical issues and challenges facing African peacebuilding. This publication series documents lectures given on the platform of the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) program, and its institutional partners. These lectures provide an analysis of processes, institutions, and mechanisms for, as well as the politics of peacebuilding on the continent, and contribute towards broadening debates and knowledge about the trajectories of conflict and peace in conflict-affected African countries and regions. The APN Lecture series seeks to address knowledge gaps in African peace and security, including its links to local, national, and global structures and processes. These publications also provide critical overviews and innovative reflections on the state of the field, including new thinking critical to knowledge production and dissemination in overlooked or emerging areas of African peacebuilding.

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Introduction

I recall clearly receiving my baptism of fire on the degree to which knowledge production on the continent was colonized. In 2012, I co-authored the book *Peacemaking in Ghana: Lessons Learned, Options for the Future*. In one of my co-authored chapter contributions to the book, titled “Beyond a drink, a fowl, and a skin: peacemaking in the conflicts between the Konkomba and their neighbors,” I had to go deep into Ghana’s colonial past to grasp the setting, dynamics, and expressions of a conflict simply referred to as the “Guinea Fowl War.” While combing through historical records, anthropological studies, and current literature on the subject, I was struck by the terrible effect of colonialism on knowledge production in Ghana. Years later, I encountered other vestiges of colonialism in the course of my research: what we are taught and, in turn, teach; the publications we respect and urge our students to reference; research processes and methods; ideas we imbibe and reproduce; and what we listen to and hear—all this bears the imprint of the colonial encounter. Knowledge creation is socially built; therefore, if our environment is highly impacted by colonialism, the knowledge we produce is tainted by the legacies of our colonial experience. That is why I ask everyone to critically reflect on their work and the methodological techniques they adopt for their research projects. They should be aware of how their approach may contribute towards strengthening colonial narratives in their field. I hope everyone here would commit to dismantling the invisible shackles that bind us as African academics, and contribute your fair share to the battle for knowledge freedom.

Distinguished professors, scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and, permit me to add, *pracademics*: it is with great pleasure and a profound sense of honor that I share a few thoughts on the ways to decolonize knowledge production praxis. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to one of the people who took me under his wing, mentored me in the early years of my career, and who has not given up on me; a man to whom African scholarship owes an immense

debt of gratitude for his unwavering crusade and commitment to raising the next generation of African scholars – Dr. Cyril Obi. I also thank my research associate, Dr. Michael Yekple, a post-doctoral fellow, for his invaluable assistance in developing this presentation.

To be able to talk to the many aspects of peacebuilding, I start with a broad foundation and work my way down to our specific subject: peacebuilding. I begin with the question, “Whose Knowledge?” and document the Eurocentric marginalization of African knowledge production. I then ask who the knowledge production orthodoxy serves. Next, I will examine how power imbalances in academia suppress the perspectives of African scholars and researchers, as well as marginalize indigenous knowledge systems. I then consider what the decolonization of knowledge production should look like. Finally, I discuss decolonizing governance, peace, and security studies in Africa, and conclude with a few thoughts.

Whose knowledge? A Eurocentric dominance in African knowledge production

The Eurocentric dominance of African knowledge production marginalizes diverse epistemologies, distorts African history, and stifles indigenous innovativeness. This perpetuates stereotypes and hinders alternative worldviews and the recognition of rich indigenous knowledge systems. Overcoming this entrenched Eurocentrism is crucial for authentic representation, and the flourishing of diverse African narratives.

This bias is a product of colonial legacies that have marginalized diverse voices and experiences. It is crucial to reassess historical narratives to decolonize knowledge production, giving due recognition to indigenous perspectives and achievements. For example, the recent discovery by archaeologists of half-million-year-old wooden structures in Zambia provides opportunities for recognizing and celebrating Africa’s contributions to human history, including the advanced skills in our ancient societies.¹ By incorporating these diverse narratives, knowledge production can break free from colonial constraints, fostering a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of Africa’s rich history.

Eurocentric educational curricula dominate many African countries. The curriculum often prioritizes European history, philosophy, and literature, sidelining indigenous knowledge systems and research methods. Students grow up learning about European achievements while the rich array of African history, philosophy, and wisdom are left in the shadows. This educational bias not only perpetuates a hierarchy of knowledge but also hampers the development of a strong sense of identity among African learners.

We have knowledge production systems that undervalue culturally sensitive

and inclusive approaches, not acknowledging the rich diversity within African societies. Relying solely on written sources and archives may lead to excluding important segments of historical narratives, especially those rooted in oral traditions. We should, therefore, embrace a variety of research methodologies that encompass both written and oral sources. By doing so, we can unearth hidden information and confront the Eurocentric biases ingrained in our academic approaches.

The dominance of Western theoretical frameworks has indeed cast a shadow over indigenous knowledge systems in Africa, perpetuating a cultural imbalance that obstructs holistic progress. While claiming universality, this hegemony neglects local knowledge embedded within African communities. Consider the traditional agricultural practices deeply rooted in the knowledge of local ecosystems and climate. These practices, often dismissed or overlooked, have sustained communities for generations. Yet they are marginalized and dismissed in the shadow of Western-centric theoretical frameworks.

This tendency to undervalue alternative systems runs across disciplines. The neglect and underdevelopment of traditional African medicine over Western medical practices come to mind. Traditional healing methods, rooted in centuries-old indigenous knowledge, are often dismissed or underrated. This undermines the efficacy of traditional practices and hinders the holistic understanding of health that these indigenous systems offer. Embracing and amplifying diverse epistemologies means acknowledging the value of traditional health systems alongside modern medicine, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to healthcare.

In the arts, African artworks are displayed in many museums as artefacts rather than vibrant expressions of living cultures. By reframing the narrative and contextualizing these artworks within their cultural and historical contexts, we can challenge the Eurocentric gaze and foster a more nuanced understanding of African artistic traditions.

The Eurocentric lens has played a pivotal role in shaping the narrative around Africa, reinforcing stereotypes that have persisted for generations. Influenced by Western ideologies and value-systems, media representations often portray Africa as being characterized by poverty, violent conflict, corruption, or exoticism, overlooking the continent's rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and intellectual contributions to civilization. To decolonize knowledge production, we must challenge and deconstruct these stereotypes, and make visible the multifaceted nature of Africa's history and contemporary realities.

The enduring influence of colonial legacies on Africa's academic landscape is evident in how research priorities reflect historical power dynamics, perpetuating

imbalances and neglecting certain narratives. This results in uneven scholarly focus, requiring a critical assessment and reframing of research agendas to decolonize knowledge production. Embracing diverse African realities and needs is essential for inclusivity and relevance, breaking away from the colonial lens for a more equitable academic environment.

To effectively decolonize knowledge production, addressing the distortion of historical narratives is crucial, as it sidelines indigenous contributions, thus skewing our understanding of Africa's past. Colonial-era depictions often portray African civilization as backward and primitive. Still, we can uncover untold stories that challenge Eurocentric narratives by exploring indigenous sources, oral histories, and alternative records.

Colonial-era perspectives often diminish the achievements of African civilizations like Great Zimbabwe (Monomotapa Empire), Nok culture, and the Bronze art of ancient Benin empire, attributing them to external influences rather than recognizing the agency and ingenuity of African societies. By revisiting and highlighting the indigenous narratives surrounding African civilizations, we can dismantle the colonial biases that have obscured the true extent of African achievements.

A much more recent example may help bring home the politics of knowledge generation and how African agency is undermined. In the 1990s, most African countries that were under military regimes transitioned to democratic rule. In many countries, the demand for the transition was endogenous, driven by a combination of politicians, professional bodies, students, and the general civil population. Without a doubt, several things aligned to give impetus to the internal push towards democracy. These include the end of the Cold War and the need for global powers to establish stable political systems for investment, as strong leaders were no longer needed. Rather, robust institutions that offered guarantees for investment were what was required. Another reason for the success of the demands was the increased accessibility to telephony and the Internet, which made mobilization easier. Yet much of the literature on Africa's third-wave of democracy suggests that African countries transitioned because of external pressures. Whilst external pressure undoubtedly played a part, it cannot be said to be the catalyst that pushed for change. The question is: why would African agency, in these processes, be discounted and undervalued?

Embracing indigenous knowledge systems is integral to decolonizing African knowledge production. Traditional wisdom passed down through generations holds profound insights into different domains of African society. By recognizing and incorporating these indigenous knowledge systems into our understanding of Africa, we enrich our perspectives and validate the contributions of historically marginalized communities to humanity.

Who does the Eurocentric knowledge production orthodoxy serve?

a. Research focus not prioritizing local needs

The Eurocentric worldview permeating academia has been a pervasive force in determining the discourse and focus of research agendas. One of the consequences of this historical legacy is a research agenda that prioritizes Western perspectives, contributing to a disconnect between academic pursuits and the lived experiences of local African communities. Notably, the historical context of colonialism dictated external influences' research priorities, with little regard for the diverse challenges and aspirations of African people. For instance, studies on economic development prioritize strategies that align with global neoliberal economic trends but may not necessarily address the specific economic challenges faced by different African regions.

In areas such as medical research, Eurocentric perspectives have driven medical studies that may not align with the prevalent health issues faced by African populations. Diseases that predominantly affect African communities receive disproportionately less attention and funding compared to those prevalent in Western societies. This misalignment hampers the development of solutions to pressing health challenges, perpetuating a skewed understanding of health concerns in the African context. An example of this is research on Malaria.

Whilst considerable progress has been made in this field, resulting in the approval of a vaccine in 2019, it was a 60-year journey. Since I am not a medical scientist, I should avoid veering into territories I may not be familiar with. However, as I reflected on this address, I could not help but wonder about the vast difference between the timelines for developing a vaccine for COVID-19 and a vaccine for Malaria. COVID-19 may have been a global pandemic, but I dare say that Malaria was Africa's pandemic for many years. My friends in the world of medical science try to explain to me that the malaria parasite is a rather complex one to understand. However, we all agree that the fundamental reason for the long delay in producing a vaccine was a lack of investment in Malaria research.

To foster decolonization in knowledge production, it is essential to champion research initiatives rooted in African communities' specific needs and aspirations. A decolonial approach would involve collaboration with local scholars, community leaders, and stakeholders to ensure that research priorities are framed collectively. This collaborative model can catalyze the generation of knowledge that is not only academically rigorous, but also resonates with the lived experiences of the people it aims to benefit.

Efforts to bridge the Afrocentric and Eurocentric worldviews are underway,

emphasizing the importance of considering diverse perspectives.² Knowledge production is recognized as a vital tool for public policy in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is facing challenges in qualitative and quantitative data.³

b. Researchers focus on international recognition rather than local needs

Research on Africa has frequently been driven by a pursuit of international recognition, sidelining local communities' immediate and pressing concerns. This tendency has led to a significant relevance deficit, leaving local communities detached from the purported benefits of academic inquiry. It is imperative to reevaluate this specific approach to knowledge production and dissemination.

The disconnect between academic research and local issues is palpable in various sectors, including healthcare and agriculture. Health research initiatives prioritize diseases prevalent in Western societies, neglecting local populations' specific health challenges. In contrast, a decolonized approach to knowledge production would involve actively engaging with local communities to identify and prioritize the most relevant health issues. By doing so, researchers can ensure that their work directly addresses the community's pressing needs, fostering a sense of ownership and resonance. They should focus on the interconnectedness of research with local realities, and help bridge the relevance deficit. This involves fostering research collaboration that connect to and empower local communities as active contributors to the knowledge production process. In doing so, research outcomes become more attuned to these communities' immediate needs and challenges, resulting in a more impactful and inclusive academic enterprise.

I present four ways through which this disconnect can be addressed and be upscaled:

1. Acknowledging the Global-Local Discrepancy: It is essential to recognize that prioritizing global considerations can inadvertently sideline local issues, creating a gap in relevance.⁴
2. Involving Locally Engaged Researchers: Engaging researchers familiar with local contexts is paramount. Their involvement will ensure a more nuanced understanding of local challenges and facilitate more effective data collection.⁵
3. Ethical Considerations in Global Research: Ethical considerations play a crucial role in maximizing impactful, locally relevant global research.⁶ For us as social scientists, it borders mainly on ensuring that the research methodologies we adopt in our efforts to harness context-specific knowledge satisfy the rigor of academic research, whilst paying attention to ethical considerations.

4. Neoliberal Globalization and Local Implications: Scholars have extensively studied neoliberal globalization and its local effects. Understanding these effects assist in crafting research that considers both global and local dynamics.⁷

c. Channels through which research topics are identified/determined

In many instances, research agendas have historically been shaped within the confines of academic institutions, often detached from the lived experiences of the communities they intend to serve. To remedy this, a paradigm shift is necessary to place inclusivity, community engagement, and partnerships with local stakeholders at the forefront of the knowledge production process.

Incorporating diverse voices in formulating research agendas is crucial to this transformative approach. Rather than solely relying on academic experts to dictate research priorities, the involvement of community members, activists, and individuals directly impacted by the research becomes a paramount concern.

Furthermore, community engagement goes beyond mere consultation; it involves building sustained partnerships that empower local communities in the knowledge-production process. This empowerment can take various forms, such as listening to, and tapping into community resources and knowledge systems; engaging with and training community members to actively participate in research design; data collection; and analysis. Empowerment through these forms transforms the research into something more representative, culturally sensitive, and contextually relevant.

In reshaping the landscape of knowledge production in Africa, it is imperative to reconsider how research topics are identified. The key is inclusivity, where community engagement plays a central role. Collaborating with local stakeholders ensures that research priorities align with the genuine needs of the community. For instance, participatory research methods involve community members in problem identification and question development, fostering a more nuanced understanding of local challenges.⁸ Strategies of community engagement are defined along a continuum, emphasizing nonacademic stakeholder activities and interactions, further emphasizing the importance of diverse perspectives.⁹ Identifying underrepresented groups in the community is a crucial step, exemplified by good practices in inclusive community engagement.¹⁰

d. Theoretical pursuits over practical needs

The relentless pursuit of theoretical excellence within academic circles has undeniably played a pivotal role in advancing knowledge. However, as we delve deeper into such theoretical frameworks, a stark dichotomy emerges—one

where the pursuit of theoretical perfection sometimes overshadows the pressing need for tangible intervention. In our quest for academic prowess, we may find ourselves ensnared in a web of intricate theories, neglecting the imperative to address real-world problems faced by communities.

The academic landscape, particularly in the context of knowledge production in Africa, often becomes a breeding ground for the cultivation and testing of theories for their own sake. In pursuing theoretical excellence, there is a risk of losing sight of the communities that should benefit from our intellectual endeavors. While developing robust theoretical frameworks is undoubtedly important, we must remain vigilant in avoiding detachment from the tangible impact these theories can and should have on the lives of individuals within our communities.

To bridge this gap between theory and practice, scholars and researchers must actively seek opportunities to ground their theoretical frameworks in the realities faced by communities. This entails fostering partnerships with local organizations, engaging in participatory research, and, crucially, listening to the voices of those directly affected by the issues under study.

The disconnect between theoretical pursuits and on-the-ground realities impedes the development of practical solutions to the pressing challenges African communities face. It is why initiatives designed without a deep understanding of local socio-economic contexts may fail to yield meaningful results. We may ponder why the excellent policies developed are often left unimplemented. An often-repeated phrase is "the lack of political will." As scholars and researchers, it may be time to unpack the real meaning of that phrase.

The key issue is how to foster a symbiotic relationship between theoretical development and practical interventions to address this imbalance and practicality crisis. Research should transcend its traditional ivory tower confines and become a collaborative endeavor. African academics must actively engage with local communities, recognizing them not merely as subjects of study but as indispensable contributors to the co-creation of knowledge. This collaborative approach is essential for crafting solutions rooted in the local people's unique needs and aspirations.

The Challenge of Power Imbalances in Academia - A practical impediment to the decolonization of knowledge production

Power imbalances in academia have long been a significant impediment to recognizing and promoting indigenous knowledge systems in Africa. At the heart of this issue lies the perpetuation of neocolonial attitudes, which further marginalize African scholars and researchers. The unequal distribution of re-

search funding, limited publication opportunities, and biased academic recognition contribute to a system that favors Western paradigms, thus hindering the flourishing of diverse African perspectives.

Neocolonialism is a formidable challenge that exacerbates the marginalization of indigenous knowledge production. The allocation of research funding often reflects a bias towards projects that align with Western frameworks, leaving many African scholars struggling to secure the necessary resources for their research. This financial disparity impedes the growth of indigenous research initiatives, reinforcing the prevailing narrative that knowledge originating from the Global North is inherently more valuable.

Moreover, the unequal distribution of publication opportunities perpetuates a cycle of academic marginalization. Journals and platforms with significant influence are often dominated by Western perspectives and scholars based in the Global North, making it challenging for African scholars to disseminate their research outputs more widely. This limited visibility further hampers the recognition of indigenous knowledge, contributing to the misconception that African scholarship lacks the depth and rigor of Western academic discourse.

The biased nature of academic recognition also plays a crucial role in maintaining power imbalances between the Global North and Global South. Prestigious awards, fellowships, and academic positions are frequently bestowed upon scholars who align with Western ideologies, while equally qualified African researchers are more likely to find themselves overlooked. This not only diminishes the credibility of African scholars but also reinforces the idea that knowledge produced in the Global North is the golden standard, continuing an endless cycle of intellectual dependency.

Accomplished African researchers based in regions or specializing on topics not considered mainstream struggle to secure research funding, face challenges in publishing their findings in influential journals, and often find themselves excluded from prestigious academic circles. Meanwhile, a Western researcher exploring a similar topic is more likely to be favored with ample support and recognition.

For example, Dr. Jean-Jacques Muyembe, a Congolese doctor, discovered Ebola in 1976, but initially lacked recognition for his pivotal finding. Despite being the first to collect a virus sample, credit eluded him until later years. Muyembe's story began after earning his Ph.D. in 1973, choosing to return to Congo instead of staying in Europe. He played a crucial role in responding to subsequent Ebola outbreaks, showcasing his ongoing dedication to public health. Muyembe's contributions underscore some African pioneers' challenges in gaining recognition for their groundbreaking work.¹¹

How should we decolonize knowledge production in Africa?

A comprehensive strategy is needed for the decolonization of knowledge production in Africa, encompassing diverse elements of academia, research, and educational resources. This strategy should encompass the promotion of indigenous languages; critical examination of colonial narratives; curriculum reform; reevaluation of research and academic practices; transformation of research dynamics; establishment of equitable international collaborations; cultivation of meaningful partnerships; and substantial investment from African governments.

In this section, we will explore the significance of elevating indigenous languages in academic settings and research, integrating these languages into educational materials and then proceed with other imperatives.

Promoting indigenous languages

Indigenous languages are the carriers of unique cultural perspectives, encompassing the depth and richness of traditional knowledge. By elevating the status of these languages within academic settings, we acknowledge their importance and empower local communities. Including indigenous languages as mediums of instruction can enhance communication, ensuring that knowledge is accessible to a broader audience. This inclusivity contributes to breaking down barriers that may have hindered specific communities from engaging fully in academic pursuits.

In research, indigenous languages are crucial for capturing the nuances and subtleties embedded in local knowledge systems. These languages carry historical narratives, oral traditions, and indigenous wisdom that might be lost in translation if communicated in colonial languages exclusively. Researchers should be encouraged to collaborate with local language experts, ensuring that the authenticity of indigenous knowledge is preserved and accurately represented. Anecdotes from successful collaborations, where indigenous languages were prioritized, can highlight the richness and depth of insights gained through this approach.

Moreover, incorporating indigenous languages into educational materials is fundamental to creating a culturally rooted knowledge base. Textbooks, learning resources, and curricula should be designed with linguistic diversity in mind. For example, including local languages in scientific publications, historical accounts, and social science materials ensures students are exposed to broader perspectives. Anecdotes of educational institutions implementing such practices and witnessing positive outcomes can be powerful illustrations of the transformative impact of linguistic inclusivity.

Imagine if our schools and universities adopted an inclusive language policy. By incorporating local languages into various academic disciplines, the institution not only attracts a diverse student body, but also witnesses an enrichment of academic discourse. Researchers will collaborate with local communities, conducting studies in indigenous languages, leading to previously overlooked discoveries.

Promoting critical reflection

Promoting critical reflection on historical narratives and encouraging research that challenges colonial perspectives is an essential aspect in decolonizing knowledge production in Africa. This process involves reexamining conventional accounts of African history, unraveling the layers of colonial bias, and fostering a more thorough understanding of the continent's rich and diverse past.

One significant aspect of this endeavor is to revisit historical events through alternative lenses that highlight the agency and resiliency of African communities. For instance, when examining the pre-colonial era, it is essential to shift away from Eurocentric viewpoints that often depict Africa as a passive recipient of historical forces. Instead, we can explore indigenous perspectives that emphasize the dynamic civilizations, advanced knowledge systems, and sophisticated trade networks that thrived across the continent. Today, the concept of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is attributed to a Western initiative. We, however, know that when Tanzania, under Nyerere, decided to continue to fight in Uganda after re-taking the Kagera Salient to protect Ugandans who had supported Tanzania from Idi Amin's reprisals, that these actions were an example of humanitarian intervention. And when Professor Ibrahim Gambari went to the UN Security Council for retrospective approval for ECOWAS' intervention in Liberia, that was also humanitarian intervention. Yet, that same concept, the right of other states to intervene to stop atrocities perpetrated by states against their own nationals, has been appropriated and rechristened as a new concept and given, at least for a while, its place in the sun.

Decolonizing knowledge production involves acknowledging the impact of colonialism on historical records and archives. Many historical documents and artifacts were selectively preserved or distorted to fit colonial narratives, perpetuating stereotypes and marginalizing indigenous voices. So, back to where I started: one of the fundamental fault lines of the conflict between the Konkomba and their neighbors is the distortion of the traditional governance structure of the Konkomba by colonialism. Initiatives that focus on reclaiming and preserving authentic African voices and narratives help bridge historical gaps, and provide a more accurate representation of the continent's past.

In education, decolonization entails revising curricula to include diverse per-

spectives and indigenous knowledge systems. If we do not know where we have come from, how will we know where we are going? Integrating African languages, literature, and philosophies into educational frameworks restores cultural dignity. It also empowers future generations to connect with their heritage. Establishing research centers and academic programs prioritizing African perspectives further contributes to a more inclusive and holistic approach to knowledge production.

Furthermore, fostering interdisciplinary collaborations and partnerships within Africa is integral to decolonizing knowledge production. Breaking down silos between academic disciplines allows for a better comprehending of complex issues, encouraging diverse perspectives to inform research and policy. For instance, collaborations between historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and indigenous knowledge holders can generate holistic insights into the multifaceted layers of Africa's history and contemporary challenges.

Reforming educational curricula

Decolonizing knowledge production in Africa requires a fundamental shift in educational paradigms, focusing on implementing reforms in educational curricula. One crucial aspect of this transformation is incorporating diverse perspectives and indigenous knowledge into the academic framework. This goes beyond merely adding content and redefining what constitutes valid knowledge within the educational system.

In many African countries, the existing curricula often reflect colonial legacies, perpetuating Eurocentric perspectives and sidelining indigenous knowledge systems. To rectify this, educational reforms should prioritize the inclusion of diverse cultural, historical, and epistemological viewpoints. For instance, history classes could be revised to encompass the colonial narrative and the rich pre-colonial histories of various African societies. Literature courses can introduce students to various historical and contemporary African voices. In South Africa, the post-apartheid government undertook a curriculum overhaul. The new curriculum aimed to dismantle the biases inherent in the previous system, with the goal of providing a more inclusive and representative education. By incorporating texts from diverse authors, including those from marginalized communities, South Africa sought to challenge the dominant narratives, imparting on students a broader understanding of their nation's history and cultural heritage.

Moreover, the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into the curricula is pivotal. Traditional ecological knowledge, for instance, can offer sustainable solutions to environmental challenges. In agriculture, indigenous practices may provide valuable insights into cultivating crop variants in specific

climates. By acknowledging and incorporating such knowledge, educational institutions empower local communities and contribute to sustainable development.

It is essential to emphasize that decolonizing education is not about dismissing Western knowledge but, rather, about creating a more inclusive and comprehensive intellectual landscape. This approach fosters critical thinking skills by encouraging students to engage with various perspectives. Doing so equips them with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of a globalized world, while maintaining a strong connection to their cultural roots.

In Kenya, initiatives like the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) represent steps towards decolonization. The CBC strongly emphasizes integrating indigenous knowledge and skills into the learning process. Subjects like Environmental Activities and Indigenous Languages are designed to bridge the gap between formal education and traditional wisdom, providing students with a holistic and culturally rich educational experience.

One notable example of successful collaboration between academia and local communities is the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) initiatives in various African countries. Researchers, alongside traditional knowledge holders, work together to document, preserve, and integrate indigenous wisdom into contemporary problem-solving. This approach ensures that the knowledge produced is context-specific, relevant, and respectful of cultural nuances.

In Kenya, collaborative efforts between scientists and traditional herbalists have led to the development of herbal remedies that merge traditional healing practices with modern scientific validation. For instance, Kenya's Natural Products Research and Drug Development (NAPREDA) has developed the Herbal medicine Zedupex, which now manages human herpes and is registered with the Pharmacy and Poisons Board. Two plant extracts for tuberculosis treatment have also been considered for registration by the unit.¹² This acknowledges the efficacy of indigenous knowledge and creates a bridge between different knowledge systems. The success stories from such endeavors underscore the potential of collaborative, community-engaged research to address the practicality crisis and contribute to the sustainable development of African societies.

Reforming educational curricula is thus a pivotal step in decolonizing African knowledge production. It involves reshaping the content, methodologies, and evaluation criteria to be more inclusive and reflective of diverse perspectives and indigenous knowledge. The examples highlighted, whether from South Africa or Kenya, showcase the transformative potential of such reforms in creating a more equitable, culturally grounded educational system.

Shift in the dynamics of research and academic engagement

Decolonizing knowledge production in Africa is a profound endeavor that demands a shift in the dynamics of research and academic engagement. One crucial aspect of this transformative process involves active engagement with local communities to identify their needs, and prioritize research topics that align with those needs. This approach ensures that research endeavors are not detached from the realities of the communities they aim to serve, fostering a socially relevant knowledge production landscape.

Mainstream research frameworks have been criticized for imposing external agendas and priorities on African communities, often neglecting the pressing issues faced by the people themselves. To counteract this, a participatory approach becomes paramount. Scholars and researchers must establish genuine partnerships with local communities, acknowledging the rich indigenous knowledge within these contexts.

Initiatives like the Mpala Research Center in Laikipia County, Kenya, exemplify the importance of involving local perspectives in the production of knowledge on African landscapes.¹³ Researchers prioritizing topics identified by communities contribute to more inclusive, context-specific, and socially impactful knowledge production. This approach challenges Western-centric notions by fostering a more equitable distribution of research resources.¹⁴

In pursuing decolonization, it is crucial to recognize that knowledge is not a one-size-fits-all entity. Each community possesses unique challenges, perspectives, and ways of knowing. Engaging with local communities in identifying and prioritizing research topics allows for co-creating knowledge, where both researchers and community members contribute their expertise.

This collaborative approach enriches the research process, ensuring that the outcomes are relevant, impactful, and capable of addressing real-world challenges.

Moreover, decolonizing knowledge production requires dismantling hierarchies in research partnerships. Instead of adopting a top-down approach, where external researchers dictate the research agenda, scholars must foster reciprocal relationships with local communities. This involves valuing and respecting the knowledge embedded in local traditions, oral histories, and cultural practices.

Equitable systems of international collaboration

Decolonizing knowledge production in Africa necessitates a paradigm shift

toward fostering international collaboration that acknowledges, respects, and values African perspectives. This transformation involves establishing partnerships grounded in the principles of mutual learning and a profound respect for the rich, diverse knowledge systems indigenous to the continent.

It is imperative to recognize that the history of knowledge production in Africa has often been marred by a legacy of colonial dominance, where Western perspectives overshadowed and marginalized indigenous ways of knowing. In order to rectify this historical imbalance, promoting international collaborations becomes a pivotal step. Such collaborations should transcend traditional power dynamics and prioritize a genuine exchange of ideas and experiences.

One exemplary model for fostering such collaboration is the establishment of research partnerships that involve scholars and institutions from African and non-African contexts. These collaborations should be built on principles of reciprocity, acknowledging that each participant brings a unique set of knowledge and insights to the table. For instance, initiatives like the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) have successfully promoted collaboration among universities across the continent, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives are acknowledged and celebrated.¹⁵ The ARUA initiative also emphasizes the importance of harnessing local knowledge for sustainable development by promoting collaborative research that draws on the strengths of both Western and African scholars.

Furthermore, encouraging joint research projects which incorporate indigenous methodologies and perspectives can significantly contribute to decolonizing knowledge production. By involving local communities and traditional knowledge holders in the research process, these projects can bridge the gap between academia and the lived experiences of the people. The Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) centers in some African universities, such as the one at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, are commendable examples of institutions that actively engage with and promote indigenous knowledge in research.

In essence, decolonizing knowledge production through international collaboration is not merely about inclusion, but about reshaping the foundations of how knowledge is generated and disseminated. It involves dismantling hierarchical structures perpetuating unequal power dynamics, and fostering an environment where African perspectives are not seen as supplementary but integral to the global discourse.

By championing partnerships prioritizing mutual learning and respect for diverse knowledge systems, we pave the way for a future where the tapestry of human understanding is woven from threads representing the richness of all cultures and perspectives. This, in turn, contributes to a more equitable¹⁷ and

Fostering meaningful partnerships

Decolonizing knowledge production in Africa is a multifaceted endeavor that demands a paradigm shift in forming and sustaining collaborations. A critical aspect of this process involves fostering meaningful partnerships between African and non-African scholars. By doing so, we can dismantle traditional power imbalances that have historically marginalized African perspectives.

It is essential to acknowledge that collaboration should not be a one-sided affair. Instead, it should be founded on principles of equity and mutual respect. One exemplary model of such collaboration is the CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa).¹⁹ This organization facilitates collaborative research efforts between African and international scholars. This initiative not only facilitates knowledge exchange but also ensures that African scholars actively contribute to shaping research agendas.

Moreover, prioritizing local expertise is pivotal in decolonizing knowledge production. African scholars possess invaluable insights into their communities, cultures, and histories. Recognizing and amplifying this expertise is not only an ethical imperative but also enriches the quality and authenticity of research.

Reevaluating research funding mechanisms is another critical step towards decolonizing knowledge production. Mainstream funding structures/organizations often favor projects led by Western institutions, perpetuating a dependency that undermines African agency. Redirecting resources to support African-led research initiatives is essential for rebalancing power dynamics. The Open African Innovation Research (Open AIR) project is an illustrative example, providing funding and support to African researchers studying innovation, development, and intellectual property. We need more of such initiatives.

Investments from African governments

Decolonizing knowledge production in Africa represents a crucial step towards fostering intellectual independence and cultivating a vibrant academic landscape on the continent. One integral facet of this transformative process involves a strategic investment by African governments in nurturing the talents and capabilities of emerging generations of African scholars. This proactive approach holds the potential to redefine the trajectory of academic discourse, empowering local voices and perspectives.

In the pursuit of this imperative, it is essential for African governments to allocate substantial resources to educational institutions, research infrastructures, research grants, and scholarship programs. Adequate funding ensures scholars can access state-of-the-art resources, cutting-edge technology, conferences, and

comprehensive academic support. This investment enables the development of rigorous research initiatives and fosters an environment where intellectual curiosity can flourish. It is a slippery slope for academics when bread and butter become the main drivers of research agendas. Unfortunately, I am afraid we may already be on that slope.

Moreover, targeted efforts should be made to establish mentorship programs that connect aspiring scholars with seasoned academics. Such mentorship is pivotal in transferring knowledge, skills, and academic ethos from experienced researchers to emerging talents. By creating a robust mentorship infrastructure, African countries can leverage the collective wisdom of their academic community, providing invaluable guidance to the next generation.

Some modest initiatives include Ghana's scholarship initiatives in renewable energy. The government, recognizing the global importance of sustainable energy solutions, invested in cultivating a cadre of experts within the country. Through generous scholarships, research grants, and collaborative projects with international institutions, Ghana is nurturing a cohort of scholars pioneering in the development of renewable energy technologies. This can elevate Ghana's standing in the global academic arena and contribute to practical advancements with tangible benefits for the nation and the continent.

Furthermore, fostering a conducive research environment involves addressing systemic barriers that hinder academic progress. African governments should actively work to dismantle barriers such as bureaucratic red tape, outdated infrastructure, and unequal access to education and opportunities. Governments can create an environment where scholars can focus on their research endeavors without unnecessary hindrances by streamlining administrative processes, improving infrastructure, and promoting inclusivity. Knowledge Systems (IKS) centers in some African universities, such as the one at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, are commendable examples of institutions that actively engage with and promote indigenous knowledge in research.

Turning to Our Field - Decolonization of governance, peace, and security research in Africa

Reexamining our approach to peacebuilding

The decolonial approach in our field calls for acknowledging the imperative to move beyond entrenched colonial legacies and engage with the continent's distinctive historical narrative. This advocacy stems from the realization that conventional Western peacebuilding strategies often inadequately address the intricate dynamics of African conflicts.

Colonization has profoundly shaped Africa's historical trajectory, leaving enduring imprints on its socio-political landscape. The repercussions of colonialism persist in influencing power structures, resource distribution, and the very nature of conflicts across the continent. Advocating for a decolonial peacebuilding approach entails a commitment to recognizing and rectifying the historical injustices that have been instrumental in fostering unrest.

This necessitates a directional change in our approaches, redirecting our focus inward to address the historical grievances of marginalized communities, minorities, and underrepresented populations within our countries. Doing so creates space for healing and reconciliation, fostering a more inclusive and contextually sensitive framework for peacebuilding. Embracing a decolonial perspective acknowledges African nations' unique historical experiences and lays the foundation for more effective, culturally resonant, and sustainable peacebuilding initiatives.

Addressing the impact of the global economy

Addressing the perpetuation of conflict in the global context requires a thorough and thoughtful examination of African countries' extractive economies. While contributing to the overall socio-economic development of nations, these economies face a critical challenge at the micro level – including lack of inclusive development, lack of human capital development, and exacerbation of social inequalities – hindering growth and fostering an environment conducive to conflict.

The extractive industry in Africa has failed to catalyze inclusive development at the micro level. In many instances, it has been the bane of the countries endowed with it. The revenue generated often bypasses essential aspects of growth, particularly human capital development. This omission creates a substantial gap in the population's skill acquisition and educational opportunities.

The lack of emphasis on human capital development is a crucial factor contributing to the perpetuation of conflict. A population with limited access to education and skill development faces higher unemployment rates and struggles to escape the cycle of poverty. As a result, marginalized communities and individuals become susceptible to recruitment by various factions, exacerbating social unrest.

Furthermore, the dependence on extractive industries creates a vulnerability to external market fluctuations. African economies become highly sensitive to changes in global commodity prices, exposing them to economic volatility. This vulnerability further stifles efforts for sustainable development and exacerbates social inequalities, creating fertile ground for conflicts to thrive.

To break this cycle, there is an urgent need for African nations to diversify their economies and shift towards inclusive development strategies. Interrogating the linkage or otherwise between human capital development, education, skill-building, and conflict is critical to sustainable peacebuilding. Existing literature reveals that focusing on economic diversification will reduce dependency on extractive industries, making nations more resilient to external shocks and fostering stable, self-sustaining economies. And this is one of the ways of preventing conflicts and building peace.

Reexamining our strategic partnerships

African governments and regional organizations must reexamine existing international partnerships, maintaining only those whose strategic interests align with the region's long-term development and peace. This involves scrutiny of international collaborations to ensure that they contribute to resolving underlying issues fueling conflicts in Africa rather than exacerbating them.

Collaboration with international partners must transcend mere security measures and delve into the socioeconomic and political factors driving conflict. Governments should seek partnerships beyond reactive responses, emphasizing preventative measures and sustainable solutions. This involves a collective commitment to addressing the economic, social, and political disparities that often catalyze unrest.

Our scholars and researchers must play a vital role in shaping policies that address the root causes of conflict. Research initiatives should focus on generating insights that inform evidence-based policies, emphasizing the importance of long-term stability over short-term gains. This involves fostering a research environment that encourages interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration between academia and policymakers.

Reexamining our peace, security, and governance instruments

We need to reexamine the policy documents of our regional organizations to make them fit for purpose. Our policy documents fail to keep up with security and governance issues on the continent. Some of them harbor grand visions of peace, security, and governance. Over the years, we have seen developments on the ground, and our regional organizations have demonstrated their inability to respond practically.

Reevaluating the policy documents of African regional organizations is imperative to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in addressing the evolving security and governance challenges across the continent. Many existing policies have proven inadequate in keeping pace with the dynamic nature of these

issues, necessitating a critical examination and potential revision.

The current policy landscape often encompasses ambitious peace, security, and governance visions. While these grand aspirations are commendable, these policies' practical implementation and adaptability to on-the-ground developments have become glaringly insufficient. The need for a comprehensive reassessment arises from the observable gap between policy intentions and the practical ability of regional organizations to respond to emerging challenges.

Over the years, we have witnessed significant peace, security, and governance issues, demanding responsive policies. Regional organizations tasked with fostering stability and good governance must recalibrate their strategies to align with contemporary realities.

One of the critical shortcomings lies in the failure of these policy documents to address emerging security threats effectively. From term limits removals to a new wave of military takeovers, regional organizations must robustly update their policies to counter these challenges. Moreover, governance issues, including corruption and ineffective institutions, demand a considerate and adaptive policy framework to foster sustainable development.

The discrepancy between policy intentions and practical implementation has become evident in instances where regional organizations struggle to respond effectively to crises. Reexamining these policy documents should involve a comprehensive analysis of their feasibility, relevance, and alignment with the current needs. It cannot be business as usual. To be able to recalibrate knowledge production in the right direction, African researchers must provide evidence-based, policy-oriented research. Talking to the right people, understanding the dynamics underpinning action, and exploring alternatives to the binary methods of "they against us" are critical to guiding Africa's policymakers and duty-bearers.

In conclusion, the decolonization of knowledge production in Africa begins with a commitment to critically reevaluate historical narratives and challenge colonial perspectives. By emphasizing indigenous voices, revisiting historical events through alternative lenses, and promoting interdisciplinary collaborations, we pave the way for a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of Africa's rich history. This process is essential for academic pursuits and is pivotal in fostering cultural pride, resilience, and a collective vision for the future.

Fostering collaboration between Western and African scholars is a crucial pillar in decolonizing knowledge production. By prioritizing local expertise and reevaluating funding mechanisms, we can create a research landscape that

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Fostering collaboration between Western and African scholars is a crucial pillar in decolonizing knowledge production. By prioritizing local expertise and reevaluating funding mechanisms, we can create a research landscape that respects diversity, empowers local voices, and contributes to the co-creation of knowledge that reflects the realities of the African continent. This approach dismantles colonial legacies and lays the foundation for a more inclusive and equitable global knowledge ecosystem.

The commitment of African governments to invest in developing the talents of a new generation of scholars is a pivotal element in the decolonization of knowledge production. This investment transcends financial support; it also encompasses mentorship, infrastructure development, and the removal of systemic barriers. Through such concerted efforts, African nations can nurture a dynamic intellectual landscape, reflecting indigenous perspectives’ diversity, richness, and authenticity. The success stories of nations exemplify the transformative power of strategic investments in building a foundation for sustainable knowledge production in Africa.

Finally, the willingness of Africa’s scholars to dare to question, critique, and propose alternatives is essential for unpacking what has been handed to us, unlearning what we know, and re-learning to decolonize knowledge production and move from His/Her story to Our story.

NOTES

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