

Philosophical foundation of knowledge on Africa

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Abstract- Context specific knowledge development is required to foster a development process in Africa that meets existential challenges. In highlighting this requirement, this paper attempts, with an emphasis on communality, a theoretical discussion of social constructionism philosophy of knowledge development and its implications for conceptualising phenomena, doing research, and contributing to scientific knowledge on Africa. The problem identified for this work is that Western philosophies and perspectives have dominated African knowledge development and use of knowledge by Africans. Thus, Africans are alienated from their own experiences of life. To this end, this work aims to construct a fundament of self-knowledge or self-consciousness as a pivotal constituent of societal building in Africa. It concludes that Africans can address their unique challenges only if science and knowledge on Africa that inform policy-making are founded on true African epistemologies, ontologies and life experiences. In this regard the culture and philosophy of commonality for instance, which fortunately exists and is practiced in all African societies can serve a cogent foundation for the development of science and knowledge in and on Africa to promote informed-solutions to societal challenges.

Index Terms- Africa, contextual knowledge, communality, informed-solutions.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this essay, a theoretical discussion of social constructionism philosophy of knowledge development and its implications for conceptualising phenomena, doing research, and contributing to scientific knowledge on Africa is attempted. The aim of this secondary research is to construct a fundament of self-knowledge or self-consciousness as a pivotal constituent of societal building in Africa. Thus, this aim is to contribute to the rediscovery of Africa by Africans as a people who live by and on their own terms. To this end, with emphasis on the culture and philosophy of communality in Africa, attempt is made in this work to respond to the issues of what the foundation of knowledge construction in Africa is and how this foundation has affected the continent's development of science and knowledge.

Social constructionism philosophy in this work denotesthe founding of assumptions underlying research on Africa on Africans' own conception and knowledge of reality. Africans generally possess their own understanding of existence and

events in their worlds. By this virtue, this essay suggests that Africa cannot be really studied meaningfully with science based on epistemologies of non-African societies, such as Western science. In other words, the validity of the conclusions scholars make in their research on Africa will be influenced by the choice of theory, methodology, and methods, as well as conceptualisation of phenomena. Against this backdrop, it is important that scholars contributing to knowledge on Africa effectively develop research procedures and methodologies that are founded on African epistemologies. The essay does not deal with the debates over different ontological positions, that is, whether a phenomenon in the African worldview really exists or not, or whether reality is false or true.

Not discounting the values for Africa of the scientific methods of research developed from other world epistemologies, a reaffirmation of science suited to peculiar African contexts will guarantee a more accurate and holistic understanding of African realities. This will in no small way assure informed policy and decision-making on development processes in Africa. In this essay, the attempt is made to point out that this reaffirmation of science suited to African realities can be achieved when scholars contributing to knowledge on Africa formulate and test their theories, concepts, methodologies, methods, and analytical frames on the bases of contexts and meaning-making in Africa. The world acknowledges that African reality and ways of knowing are different from those of other societies. The implication of this is that one set of approach for validating knowledge in some different cultural and social setting cannot be wholly applied to African contexts. Knowledge is socially constructed, and should therefore be subject to ways of validation peculiar to how societies understand their realities. Yet, unfortunately, objectivism or positivism, which posits the universality of science, seems to dominate validation of research and knowledge on Africa.

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The problem addressed in this paper is what its authors identify as Western domination of knowledge development in Africa. The problem was identified through the experiences of the authors of this paper as University faculties who teach African studies courses in their respective universities. Students' representation of themselves and African societies, as well as most available academic teaching and learning materials on

Africa are based largely on Western perceptions. Western ideas have dominated the interpretation of Africa including most Africans themselves. The result is that Africans have come to hold a poor conception of themselves (which can be described as poverty of self-conception). Thus, cultural xenocentrism and cultural imperialism are rife among Africans.¹ While there is sincere effort around the globe to avoid or minimise xenocentrism and culture imperialism, much theory and knowledge on Africa in important respects fail to acknowledge the authenticity and richness of African culture and philosophies, which ironically mediate everyday life of African peoples.

A great deal of Western perceptions of Africa has misrepresented the histories, cultures, and philosophies of Africans, thus compounding the alienation of Africans from themselves. For instance, the group of eminent African scholars constituting the UNESCO International scientific committee for the drafting of a General history of Africa points out clearly how Eurocentric authorship of African colonial history misrepresented important aspects of African resistance to European colonisation of the continent, to the extent that some erroneously believe Africans generally welcomed European colonisation.² How can a people welcome domination by another group of people! Such wrong Eurocentric perceptions and misrepresentations clearly demonstrate the enormity of the challenge of knowledge on Africa. It convincingly makes the case for Africans to develop their own knowledge base, drawing on experiences, philosophies, and cultures of Africa.

The source of this problem lies largely with the lack of theorisation and knowledge development based on African experiences of their own lives. Of course, theorisation and knowledge development cannot proceed in a vacuum, so that Western perspectives only fill a space where African perspectives are absent. For instance, since we have not developed to utilise the immense values of traditional medicine in Africa, it is interesting to observe how Western science denounces and stifles African knowledge of medicine with its own version of medical knowledge that invariably only tend to come around with the same conclusion of efficacy. Consequently, Africa tends to live the expectations of other societies, with all its attendant futility to reach their goals. It is the conviction in this work that Africans cannot contribute effectively to global knowledge until they work from their own foundations of knowledge, challenging existing Western centred forms of knowledge. Sub-Sahara Africa's share of global research currently stands at less than one percent (0.72%), while citations to the region's articles comprise a small though growing share of global citations, standing currently at 0.28%. (World Bank 2014: 3).³

¹Xenocentrism is the opposite of ethnocentrism, and refers to the belief that another culture is superior to one's own. Cultural imperialism is the domination of one society's culture in another.

² See for instance Boahen, Adu (1985) (Ed.). Africa and the colonial challenge, in UNESCO (1985) General history of Africa. Africa under colonial domination, 1880-1935. Vol. VII. Paris: UNESCO. pp. 1-18.

³ See also United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2008). 'Investing in the Future: R & D Expenditure in

In the view of this work, this low share of global knowledge is because African scholars are neither Europeans nor Americans, but have placed themselves on expectations to produce scholarly materials based on Western standards, ideas, and philosophies. Africa has thus alienated and lost itself from the rest of the world, controlled by external knowledge of the continent. The situation is never hopeless though nor is Africa a lost continent. Increasing interests of the world in Africa - China, India, US - foretell that indeed, there are more prospects today for Africa to emerge as one of the brightest regions of the world in all aspects of human endeavour. For this reason, we must keep doing something for ourselves and by ourselves as Africans. This work is a contribution in this regard.

III. METHODOLOGY

Ideas in this work are mostly the result of a review of existing published and unpublished literature. It is largely a desk study that was conducted between June 2015 and February 2016. Various sorts of materials were manually and virtually accessed and interpreted with a social constructionism framework to understand their understanding of the challenge of knowledge development on Africa. The social constructionism interpretation of existing literature means reviewing these materials on their notions of how far context-based knowledge on Africa is credible and authentic. Sources of these literature were journals, institutional websites and repositories, and internet browsers such as google scholar. Particularly for journals, a large chunk of the literature was obtained from the University of Bayreuth library in Germany. Other journals were also sourced from CODESRIA's online library system. Anything that borders on African worldviews and debates of validity of science was reviewed. Thus, choice of articles was purposive, according to the content of the article in meeting the needs of this paper.

IV. ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY, AND THE RELEVANCE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

Ontology and epistemology

Explanations of results of any scientific research within philosophical frameworks of ontology and epistemology are fundamental to all science (Crotty 1998; Ratner 2008; Long et al. 2000). Ontology is basic to all meaning in reality and knowledge construction. Ontology refers to what is out there to know. It has to do with whether something exists as real (realism) or as perceived (subjectivism). Ontology is thus a theory of existence, concerned with the nature of reality and that of human beings (Lee 2012). Arguably, no science can flourish without ontology. Indeed, Ratner (2008) argues that realism and therefore ontology is fundamental to all science. There can only be science about phenomena, if those phenomena are real. If phenomena are not real, then there can be no scientific study of those phenomena.

Africa', Science with Africa Conference, 3 to 7 March 2008, Addis Ababa. http://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/14952/bib.%2057176_1.pdf?sequence=1

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge embedded in the theory, methodology, and method of investigation. It is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know. It is about what we can hope to know about reality and how we might acquire knowledge about that reality (Hay 2011: 169; Bahari 2010: 18; Crotty 1998: 3; Lee 2012: 5). In this respect, if one denies ontology or epistemology, they can be said to have renounced the possibility of the science of the phenomena.

Relevance of ontology and epistemology for science

Ontology and epistemology come along together (Crotty 1998: 10-11; Hay 2011: 169). Every knowledge claim embodies a certain way of understanding what is to know (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding how to know what to know (epistemology). In any investigation and knowledge formation process, answering the fundamental question of how we justify the choice of theory, methodology, and method significantly depends on the assumptions about reality in the society we research. It depends as much also on the researcher's assumptions of reality and knowing. In this regard, the pivotal epistemological questions in research include: what kind of knowledge do we believe will be attained by our research? And what characteristics do we envision that body of knowledge to have? (Crotty 1998: 2; Bahari 2010). It is therefore crucial for sound and systematic investigation and knowledge claim to distinguish between, and be founded on, clear ontological and epistemological philosophies.

Double (2003: 511) rightly cautions that our conclusions about whether a purported entity is subjectively or objectively 'real' can have theoretical importance for our beliefs and actions. Double (2003: 516) writes further that in questions of meaning and all human actions, it is belief, not truth that drives human behaviour. The perspectives of this essay draw on Double's views that belief is conviction that is socially constructed and can lead to socially constructed knowledge. Socially constructed knowledge means the science on which that knowledge is based is only valid insofar as it is appropriately based on ontology and epistemology of the people concerned. Long et al. (2000: 190-191) give a concise explanation of ontological and epistemological backgrounds of knowledge development. Writing on (social) ontology, they note that assumptions held about the nature of reality, that is, whether reality is objective and external to the individual, or whether it is subjective and cognitively constructed on an individual basis, is fundamental to any knowledge construction. The essence of this point is that every phenomenon of research interest and knowledge development has ontological and epistemological underpinnings. The way a phenomenon or occurrence is perceived has implications for how knowledge about it is acquired and interpreted. Groups of people inhabit and experience different geographical spaces. In this respect, perception of nature and ways of knowing will not be the same for different societies. Such differences cannot be ignored in the development of knowledge, as we see above. According to Crotty (1998: 27), the principal difference between positivism and subjectivity is that by positivist thinking, science is objective while opinions and beliefs are subjective and constitute essentially a different kind of knowledge from scientifically established facts. Crotty writes further that whereas people ascribe subjective meaning to objects

in their world (assuming these objects exist in the first place), science (value-neutral science) really 'ascribes' no meaning at all. Instead, science discovers meaning, for it is able to grasp objective meaning; that is, meaning already inherent in the objects it considers. Crotty continues that to say that objects have such meaning is, of course, to embrace the epistemology of objectivism.

However, Crotty's point can also imply that science discovers the meaning that is imputed or constructed by the particular epistemology on which such science is founded. This is not objectivism, but rather constructionism, since objective science can only discover the kind of meaning in reality imputed as such by the people experiencing that reality. Therefore, it can be argued that what can be deemed non-scientific knowledge in the context of a society's philosophy of science may be in actual fact objective science in another society with a different philosophy of science. The implication of this argument is that objective knowledge is not limited to only one form of epistemology. Objective science can be pursued in every society insofar as the methods of that science are grounded in the peculiar ontology and epistemology of the society.

Arce and Long (1992: 211) hold a similar opinion. They define knowledge as the ways in which people categorise, code, process, and impute meaning to their experiences. To them, the concept of knowledge should not carry with it the implication of 'discovering the real facts', as objectivism will want us believe, as if only one kind of meaning can be imputed into facts, and that knowledge lay 'out there' ready for uncovering. For Arce and Long, knowledge is not accumulation of facts. Instead, knowledge involves different ways of construing the world inhabited by different cultures. As Ratner (2008) notes, even culturally specific phenomena can be objectively researched and explained in a way to achieve universal/general validity through the application of specific methodological procedures and interpretative frameworks.

Benson and Craib (2001) argue that contrary to common acceptance there is nothing like objective and universal knowledge of the social world, since different cultures have different ways of understanding nature. They opine that contemporary requirements in science for universality and objectivity are the products of Western civilization, and there is no justification to impose this Western civilization (requirements) on other cultures which are radically different in many respects. In their view, possibly, modern requirements of scientific work can be an imposition and perpetuation of power and dominion of Western culture on other cultures, that is, cultural imperialism. Following the ideas of Benson and Craib, it can be added that any society can reason in its own right and on its own terms. Meaning making in reality and interactions in the context of the myriad of cultures in Africa as distinct from other cultures of the world makes social constructionism a more feasible knowledge philosophy.

Social constructionism is the perspective that we construct meaning in reality. Meaning in reality is not fixed, and Africans, even with the myriad of cultures, have their unique meaning imputing in reality. The construction of this meaning is always directed by the given cultures and social dynamics of Africans. Culture serves as resources on which actors draw in making sense of their experiences and in orienting themselves to the

world they encounter and the challenges it presents to them (Hay 2011: 170). While humans may be described in constructionist terms as engaging with their world and making sense of it, every society's culture (and social dynamics) brings things into view for them and endows these things with meaning. By the same token, culture leads to ignore other things, implying that humans are not just individuals but participant in a given culture (Crotty 1998: 54; Young and Collin 2004; Greelan 1997). Social constructionists take the view that knowledge is the product of our unique social practices and institutions, or of the interactions and negotiations between relevant social groups. Social constructionism emphasises the hold our culture has on us. It shapes the ways we see and feel things, and gives us a quite definite view of the world (Leach et al. 2007; Crotty 1998: 58).

Logically, one cannot doubt that at different times and in different places, there will be many and divergent interpretations of seemingly the same phenomena. This is because different people may well inhabit quite different worlds, and their different worlds constitute for them diverse ways of knowing (Berg 2000; Bader 2001; Hay 2011: 170). This is relativism. Thus, relativism is compatible with social constructionism, and prevents dogmatism and cultural imperialism (Gergen 2001b; Crotty 1998: 64), giving all interpretations voice and space to be heard (Raskin&Neimeyer 2003). Even though in relativism all interpretations are given voice and space to be heard, nonetheless, it is always possible to differentiate useful interpretations from those that serve no useful purpose (Crotty 1998: 47-48). Useful interpretations follow clear methodological or interpretative procedures that fit the context of what one investigates. Such a view is similar to the point in Bevir and Rhodes (2005) that for interpretivists, producing objective knowledge boils down to making clear one's epistemological position.

V. MAKING KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS ON AFRICA

The debate over whether there is reality in or outside our consciousness, that is, whether reality is constructed or not is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, the question of reality is considered in the context of cultures in Africa. In other words, this essay considers or examines the issue of whether knowledge (meaning) in phenomenon exists as a single true fact everywhere and should be discovered, even in the African context.

What 'African' is

The adjective 'African', in this essay stands for peoples and their philosophies, cultures, and practices originally identified with the geographical region, the continent of Africa, irrespective of whether such peoples live currently on the continent or abroad. The geographical delineation of Africa as a continent gives a uniqueness of peoples inhabiting or originating from this continent that can be referred to as African. The experiences of peoples defined as Africans form the basis of African specific cultural values and social systems. To Nkulu-N'Sengha (2005), given the specificity of their location in the world and their experiences in human history, African peoples have specific ways of understanding and explaining the world and the complexity of the human condition. Nkulu-N'Sengha's view implies that the unique cultures of the African peoples mean that

existence is not interpreted the same way as in other cultures outside the continent. African cultures have been affected a great deal by other cultures in different parts of the world.

What is qualified as African in this study always bears some direct or indirect connection to the African continent. For instance, accounts of people of African descent living outside the African continent, commonly referred to as African diaspora, speak of elements of African culture in countries such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, United States, Guyana, Haiti, Barbados, Puerto Rico, Surinam, and Dominican Republic. In this respect, specific qualities define phenomena and people as African. For instance, traditionally Africans generally place community and ancestry at the centre of existence and knowing. Every phenomenon, including humans, that bears the adjective 'African' generally shares in this specific way of knowing. Thus, African knowledge systems are not impositions from elsewhere, though they have been influenced a good deal by knowledge systems of other cultures outside Africa. From these, African epistemology then is the African theory of knowledge, which includes the African conception of the nature of the world, the means and criteria to acquire valid knowledge about that world, and the role that knowledge plays in human existence.

Hamminga (2005) rightly notes that the specificity of African epistemology is however, not universal throughout the whole of Africa. Within the continent, every ethnic group has its own ancestors with the knowledge relevant to this particular tribe. Ethnic groups have become quite different in procreation, so does their knowledge. Thus, even within Africa, there is a diversity of cultures. The diversity of Africa is evident in the myriad of ethnic groups, estimated at over 2,000 in number (Asante 2005). Indeed, many of what is mostly called ethnic groups⁴ in Africa will pass as nations, some of which some scholars say are larger than contemporary European states (Achebe 2000; Asante 2005). Such great diversity of African peoples though, adds to the challenge of finding a suitable way of legitimising knowledge on Africa, in a way that avoids the disservice of over generalisations.

It is crucial for African peoples to engage with and reassess existing narratives of their own history prior to colonisation and Western influence, such as encouraged by the eminent African philosopher Cheikh Anta Diop. The engagement with and reassessment of the true history of African no doubt will enable evidence-based assessment of science and the consequent knowledge on Africa it churns out. In spite of the great diversity of African peoples though, there are particular ontologies and epistemologies that connect Africans together, and set them apart from other peoples of the World. Engagement with the true history of Africa will help clarify even better these ontologies and epistemologies. A sure way to do this is to promote studies on Africa in the educational systems in all African countries. A course on African philosophies and philosophical foundations of knowledge can be included in the syllabi of all programmes from the primary to university level education. It entails developing teaching and learning materials and methods that Africans can

⁴ An ethnic group traces its origin to a single female or male ancestor. (See Asante, M. K. 2005 African ethnic group, Encyclopaedia of Black Studies: SAGE Publications.

identify with. Moreover, non-formal educational systems if developed will complement the formal systems. The aim of this proposed educational system on Africa is to develop the minds of young people and adults alike on African philosophy, culture, and practices.

The element of community in knowing

Communitality is a crucial African culture and philosophy that should provide a cogent foundation to science and knowledge on Africa. Culturally, the experience of an African reality gives rise to general qualities in African philosophy, one of these being the discourse of community in Africa, also referred to as communalism (Higgs 2010: 2416). Africans generally place community at the centre of existence and knowing. Following Higgs (2010: 2417, citing also Tönnies 1988), community in this sense refers to the sort of life that is characterised by warm or binding relationships between persons. To Higgs (2010: 2418), community consists of a number of peoples who have something in common with one another that connects them in some way, and that distinguishes them from others. The basis of this connection can be geographical, language, and ethnic or religious identification. In this context, community in Africa is experienced in connected harmonious interactions between peoples, and between people and their non-human environments.

A person is always born and grows within a clan or tribe, lives by and practices its core values of existence. In all their interactions with other peoples and nature, they are expected to be cognisant of the values, beliefs, and norms of the tribe to which they belong. These communal values underlie most interactions with neighbours and nature. Higgs cites Letseka (2000: 181) that the importance of communitality to traditional African life cannot be overemphasized. This is because community and belonging to a community of peoples constitute the very fabric of traditional African life. For example, amongst the Wanga, a Luhya clan in Kenya, all members of the clan trace their ancestry to one person. For this reason, members of the clan see themselves as brothers and sisters, such that it is an abomination for anyone, male or female, to marry another person from the same clan; if they did, they would have committed incest. In case a child is born accidentally to two clan members, this child is considered an outcast and does not share in any inheritance of the clan. The communitality in this instance is the knowledge that all clan members hail from one ancestor, and that they are brothers and sisters. Communalism and peculiar ways it manifests set African societies apart from others.

In the West for instance, existence is generally individualistic. The individual is an entity that is capable of existing and flourishing on its own, to a large extent unconnected to a community of other individuals, not seriously bound by any biological relationships or socioeconomic, political, and cultural relationships, obligations, duties, responsibilities, and conventions that frame and define a community of individuals (Higgs 2010: 2416, citing Menkiti 1979:158, and Tönnies 1988). Though scholars like Gyekye (1998) argue that in Africa individualism exists side-by-side with communalism, this essay maintains that for the African, communitality is in fact fundamental to existence for all forms of life, whether human or non-human; everything is connected to everything.

Everyday experiences of communal life in Africa inform that man and nature interact and shape each other's existence and experiences. Nature is an integral component of self and the community to which one belongs, and this constitutes a foundation of knowledge development and existence. For instance, among the Dormaa, an Akan speaking people in mid-western Ghana, land cannot be sold. In the environmental ontology of the Dormaa, the natural environment is more than just biological. It is also spiritual, with the power to guarantee the existence of every member of the community. In this environmental ontology, land belongs not only to the present generation, but to past and future ones as well, with equal rights. The Dormaa customary property rights regime and practices on the natural environment must necessarily uphold this custom to preserve nature and community. Though not the focus in this work, it is worth noting that spirituality serves a vital component of communitality in Africa. Some authorities add to communitality a strong dimension of spiritism and ancestry; the fact that African epistemology places emphasis on spirits and involves an understanding of the world through a spiritual source (Bakari1997; Millar 2005). In this spiritual and ancestry context, no reality exists without a spiritual inclination. The universe, nature, humans, and spirits are all considered one, a commune.

VI. SIFTING EXTERNAL INFLUENCE ON AFRICA

Millar (2005) cautions that the notion that the world is now a village is subsumed under a 'universal science'. To Millar, in establishing the bases for a 'scientific world', scholars and practitioners lose sight of the earlier colonisation role that the 'universal science' has played in subjugating Africa to other societies. Indeed, Millar's assertions can be understood that failed approaches and theories that do not fit the African socio-cultural context are contributory reasons for the social and economic challenges in Africa today. Moyo (2009) presents a classic instance of how development aid practice fails to properly conceptualise the real needs of the various countries that have received aid over the years, contributing to poverty in Africa. Macamo (2005) blames Western policies for the failure of Africa to develop. According to him, development policies are based on a flawed analysis of the history of development, which eventually only is pursued for Western interests.

Having established in this essay the specificity of the African ways of existence and knowing, particularly the centrality of communitality, knowledge claim-making on Africa must sift foreign influences to shirk undue ideologies so as to adequately address Africa's unique challenges. Hountondji (2009) succinctly expresses foreign influences on African scientists. He observes that African scholars tend to investigate subjects with values that are of interest first and foremost to a Western audience. Most articles on Africa are published in journals located outside Africa and therefore are meant for a non-African readership. In this sense, African scholarship is externally oriented, intended to meet the theoretical needs and scientific procedures of Western counterparts and answer the questions they pose. Hountondji notes that the exclusive use of European languages as means of scientific expression reinforces this alienation of African scholarship from African realities. He believes, despite the progress in African-focused scientific

communities, however, that Africans are still a long way to develop an autonomous, self-reliant process of knowledge formation that enables Africans to answer their own questions and meet both the intellectual and the material needs of their societies. Hountondji makes a valid point. To meet the intellectual and material needs of their societies, Africans must produce knowledge themselves; knowledge grounded in African philosophy as elucidated above. Moreover, it is not beyond the capabilities of Africans to develop regionally or continentally common languages through which scholarship can be developed. For instance, in East Africa, Kiswahili is a regional lingua franca, as official language in Tanzania and Kenya. It is spoken in everyday life in several other countries such as Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, and the Comoro Islands.

The quest to find adaptive ways of contributing to knowledge on Africa should be premised on African ontology and epistemology. In light of the negative consequences of foreign influence on African life in all aspects, it is crucial that African scholars contributing to knowledge on Africa conceptualise their phenomena of interest in ways that adequately reflect African notions of existence and meaning making. As Zambakari (2011) notes, in the absence of conscious efforts to develop a pragmatic science and methods of contributing to knowledge that adequately fit African socio-cultural contexts, Africans will remain prisoners of knowledge and thus trapped by paradigms of knowledge constructed in historical and social realities completely different from theirs. Zambakari rightly cautions that Africa's success in all aspects of life hinges precisely on its ability to take hold of the fields of inquiry by formulating original 'problematics' that respond to issues that are first and foremost important to Africans and rooted in their own experience.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

In research on Africa, discussions of ontology and epistemology are important due to the acknowledgement in literature that African societies are founded on different ontologies and epistemologies, distinct from those of peoples in other parts of the world. It is contended severally that much of Africa's challenges thrive on the domination of Western philosophies of science on Africa. Yet, it is contended in this paper that African scholarship can produce adaptive theory, methodology, and analytical, interpretive procedures on the foundations of the real experiences and philosophies of Africans. These will inform policy decisions and enable Africans to take complete charge of their own development processes. Thus, in this essay, attempt has been made with particular emphasis on communality, to contend that knowledge development on Africa be grounded on Africans' socially constructed conceptualisation of the world.

Scholarship contributing to knowledge on Africa should particularly take into consideration the ways different cultures impute meaning to phenomena. One such area of consideration is the culture and philosophy of commonality, which fortunately exists and is practiced in all African societies. Thus, communality can serve a cogent foundation of science and knowledge development in and on Africa. Such a foundation will

result in an adaptive science and knowledge that adequately will solve the myriad of challenges in Africa. In spite of some everyday negative labelling of Africa in global media and in the consciousness of non-Africans, this work is convinced that the continent and its people are far from hopelessness and gloom. There is increasing observation that more and more Africans are accepting and boldly confronting the challenge of 'together we must do it now and do it ourselves'.

VIII. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is important to groom the minds of Africans about their own realities and free them from undue foreign influences. It is imperative for educational policy to encourage extensive readings in Studies on African philosophy and foundations of knowledge among young people in schools and colleges. Studies on African philosophy and foundations of knowledge should be made compulsory in all curricular from the basic to the university level. This engagement with the true history, philosophies, and practices of Africa will enable African young peoples to better understand and appreciate their own social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances and factors that shape these circumstances. In this way, Africans will better be able to problematise and analyse their social dynamics in order to provide self-made solutions to problems.
- It cannot be denied the fact that investment in research and development is a vital ingredient for a people to own their own processes of development. African governments and research institutions should be willing to invest more resources than they currently do to investigating their own societies and the dynamics that underlie them. African scholars should endeavour to spend more energy and resources to interact with communities as they investigate events. Regular workshops to exchange ideas between scholars, practitioners, and community people about their values and experiences will provide valuable insights to define unique theories, procedures, and tools of investigating African dynamics. It is the only way scholars can better respond to issues that are first and foremost important to Africans and rooted in their own experience.
- Readership of scholarship on Africa among Africans is low. It cannot be overemphasised that research results on Africa should be accessible and affordable to Africans everywhere, even in remote villages. To do this, individual scholars, research institutions, and publishing houses who are genuinely interested in contributing to sound knowledge on Africa, as well as African governments should make it a priority to step up efficient publishing scholarship in Africa. Corporate entities and governments can include in their social responsibility policies, financial and logistic support to local media, whether print or electronic, for simple and readable scholarship to be regularly accessible to community people wherever they live.

It is important that there should be more proactive interaction between African researchers, African policy makers in government or cooperate entities, and communities so as to promote the utility of research results. In the first place, there is the need for researchers in universities, research institutions, and corporate entities as a matter of priority to coordinate their research energies to avoid duplicating efforts and confusing policy makers and communities. When this is done, researchers will be better placed to establish constant dialogue and exchange of ideas with policy makers and communities. African politicians, technocrats, researchers, and communities will find it rewarding to put to use research findings, which can contribute to better testing the validity of research theories and methodologies on the basis of peculiar experiences of communities. In Ghana for example, the 'Meet the Press' series is a monthly socio-political event at which various government ministries meet with the Press to discuss sector policies, programmes, challenges, and solutions. It is an instance of a sort of mechanism advocated for, but which should encourage community participation. The mechanism can be decentralised from the national through the regional to the sub-regional levels to serve as a platform for all researchers and practitioners at all levels of governance, academia, and space to engage with each other and with communities.

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