



Book Review: Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Youth Entrepreneurship: Recentring the Voices of Marginalized Communities in Africa¹²

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“Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Youth Entrepreneurship: Recentring the Voices of Marginalized Communities in Africa” is a thought-provoking and timely contribution to the ongoing debate on how Africa can address the persistent challenge of youth unemployment. Edited by Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba, Inocent Moyo, and Lethiwe Zondo, and published open access by Bloomsbury Academic in 2025 as an outcome of the African Indigenous Knowledge Research Network (AIKRN) in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, the volume brings together scholars from East, West, and Southern Africa to explore how Indigenous knowledge systems (IKSs) can be placed at the centre of entrepreneurship and employment policy. What distinguishes this book is its insistence on listening to the voices of Indigenous youth, elders, and women themselves, rather than treating marginalized communities as passive objects of policy design.

The volume is structured into two parts. The first part lays the theoretical and methodological foundations of the book, engaging with the long-standing debates on the decolonization of knowledge and the recentring of Afrocentric approaches to research. The second part presents a rich collection of case studies from across the continent, examining how Indigenous communities such as the Maasai, Batwa, Banyankole, Ijaw, and Ogoni navigate questions of governance, natural resource access, and entrepreneurship in their own specific contexts.

The opening chapter, written by Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba, sets the tone for the entire volume by arguing that the silencing of African knowledge systems was one of the most damaging legacies of colonialism. Drawing on the concept of “epistemicide”, the author demonstrates how postcolonial states in Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa have continued to design employment and entrepreneurship policies according to Eurocentric models, largely ignoring the rich entrepreneurial traditions that existed in Africa long before colonial intrusion. The chapter convincingly shows that policies imposed from above, without engaging the Indigenous youth, elders, and women who hold the

¹ DOI: 10.12700/jceas.2026.6.2.541

² Oloruntoba, Samuel Ojo, Inocent Moyo, and Lethiwe Zondo, eds. *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Youth Entrepreneurship: Recentring the Voices of Marginalized Communities in Africa*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2025. ISBN: 978-1666952049. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. \$37,95 (Paperback).

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relevant knowledge, have repeatedly failed to reduce unemployment among marginalized groups such as the Maasai and the Ogiek.

In the second chapter, Endurance Uzobo turns to methodology, advocating for an Afrocentric approach to researching Indigenous youth. The chapter offers a useful overview of ethnographic techniques – life histories, key cultural consultants, participant observation, genealogical methods, and various forms of qualitative analysis such as narrative, discourse, and thematic analysis – and explains why these tools are particularly well suited to capturing the lived realities of African Indigenous communities. The third chapter, by Yakubu Abubakar, builds on this methodological discussion by making the case for participatory research as a vehicle for co-producing knowledge with Indigenous communities, rather than merely extracting data from them.

The second part of the book opens with Ambrose T. Kessy's analysis of governance institutions among the Maasai communities of Arusha, Tanzania. The chapter traces the historical marginalization of the Maasai, from the colonial-era Masai Development Plan to contemporary conflicts over conservation areas such as Loliondo and Ngorongoro and argues that any meaningful entrepreneurship policy must engage with Maasai governance structures rather than bypass them. In the following chapter, John Mary Kanyamurwa examines the Batwa of south-western Uganda, showing through eleven key informant interviews and focus group discussions how restrictive funding guidelines and the loss of access to the Bwindi and Mgahinga forests have severely limited Batwa youth entrepreneurship, despite the efforts of civil society organizations on the ground.

A particularly engaging chapter is the gendered assessment of milk safety practices among smallholder Banyankole farmers in Kiruhura District, Uganda, by Judith Irene Nagasha and colleagues. Based on a survey of over three hundred households, the authors document in fascinating detail the Indigenous utensils and techniques – such as the ekishabo churning gourd and the use of smoking plants like *Terminalia brownii* and *Hyparrhenia rufa* – that are still used to preserve and process milk. The chapter shows that while women bear the heaviest burden in milk handling and processing, cultural taboos continue to exclude them from the actual milking of cattle, a finding that raises important questions about how IKSs intersect with gender inequality.

Lethiwe Zondo, Khayelihle Sibisia, and Wandile Zondo contribute a powerful chapter on the iNanda Tribal Land surrounding the iNanda Dam in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Combining African philosophical frameworks with an analysis of the devastating April 2022 floods, the authors demonstrate how the construction of large dams disrupted Indigenous early warning systems and destroyed youth-owned enterprises, while upstream pollution from affluent communities continues to threaten the livelihoods of Indigenous youth downstream. The chapter is a sobering reminder that environmental governance and entrepreneurship promotion cannot be separated from questions of historical dispossession and ongoing structural inequality.

Samantha Williams then explores the cultural and knowledge practices embedded in small-scale fisheries in the Ebenhaeser community on South Africa's Olifants River. Through focus group discussions and household surveys, the chapter illustrates how



fishing represents far more than an economic activity for this community – it is a source of identity, belonging, and intergenerational knowledge transfer, even as fishers continue to be marginalized within formal fisheries governance structures.

The remaining chapters extend the discussion to Indigenous communities and access to natural resources more broadly, and to youth perspectives on entrepreneurship and employment among the Ijaw and Ogoni peoples of the Niger Delta in Nigeria. These chapters collectively reinforce one of the book's central arguments: that the chronic failure of government programs to reduce unemployment in marginalized communities stems directly from the exclusion of the voices and knowledge of the very people these programs claim to serve.

What makes this volume particularly valuable is its refusal to romanticize Indigenous knowledge as an automatic solution. Several chapters candidly discuss the tensions and contradictions involved – for instance, the gendered burdens placed on women in milk production, or the cultural taboos that restrict certain economic activities. At the same time, the book makes a compelling case that any sustainable approach to youth entrepreneurship in Africa must build on, rather than override, the knowledge systems that communities have relied upon for generations.

In conclusion, this is a richly documented and important contribution to the literature on African development, entrepreneurship, and decolonization. By bringing together theoretical reflection and grounded case studies from East, West, and Southern Africa, the editors have produced a volume that genuinely succeeds in recentring the voices of marginalized communities. I highly recommend it to researchers, policymakers, and practitioners working on youth employment, Indigenous rights, and sustainable development in Africa.