

Navigating the Epistemic Terrain

A Qualitative Exploration of African Studies Research in Seychelles, 2000–2026

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ABSTRACT

The production of knowledge about Africa within African institutions is a critical aspect of epistemic sovereignty. While debates on decolonising academia are prominent, there is limited qualitative investigation into the operational realities of African Studies research in small island developing states. This study aimed to explore the specific challenges and prospects faced by researchers and academics engaged in African Studies within a small island state context, using Seychelles as a case study. A qualitative, constructivist approach was employed, involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a purposively sampled cohort of established researchers, early-career academics, and institutional stakeholders. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. A dominant theme was the structural tension between global academic expectations and locally relevant research praxis. A significant proportion of participants (approximately 70%) reported that pressure to publish in internationally ranked journals actively disincentivised community-engaged research methodologies valued within local development contexts. The research environment is characterised by a dual burden where scholars must navigate externally validated metrics of excellence while attempting to produce knowledge that is epistemically grounded and responsive to local community needs. Academic institutions should develop hybrid promotion criteria that value locally engaged scholarship. Funding bodies ought to create specific streams supporting long-term, participatory research projects aligned with national development plans. African Studies, epistemic sovereignty, knowledge production, qualitative research, small island developing states, research praxis This paper provides novel empirical evidence of the structural disincentives for community-embedded research within African Studies, proposing a policy mechanism for hybrid academic reward systems.

Keywords: *Epistemic sovereignty, Decolonisation of knowledge, African Studies research, Small Island Developing States, Qualitative inquiry, Knowledge production, Seychelles*

Article Highlights

- 70% of researchers report international publication pressure disincentivizes community-engaged methodologies.
- Reveals the dual burden of navigating global metrics while producing locally relevant knowledge.
- Proposes hybrid promotion criteria to value locally engaged scholarship in academic institutions.
- Calls for dedicated funding streams supporting long-term, participatory research aligned with development plans.

Core Finding

The study identifies a structural tension where global academic expectations actively marginalize the community-engaged research methodologies essential for epistemic sovereignty in small island contexts.

This qualitative analysis offers empirical grounding for policy discussions on decolonizing academic reward systems.

ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

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