



A Case Study in Kenya: Community Agency and the Decolonisation of West African Research Initiatives (2021-2026)

A Case Study in Kenya:
Community

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Shannon White-Davies

Department of Advanced Studies, University of Nairobi

Amina Ochieng

Department of Advanced Studies, University of Nairobi

Correspondence: swhitedavies@gmail.com

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Abstract

This case study examines the critical, yet often overlooked, role of local Kenyan communities in shaping and implementing a major West African research initiative within African Studies. It addresses the persistent epistemic marginalisation whereby externally conceived projects frequently bypass the agency and knowledge systems of the communities they study. Focusing on a specific collaborative research programme in Kenya involving partners from West Africa and Europe (2021–2026), the methodology employs rigorous qualitative analysis, including triangulated data from project archives, semi-structured interviews with community elders, local researchers, and project leads, and sustained participatory observation. The findings demonstrate that structured, formalised agency—specifically through local community advisory councils—proved instrumental in decolonising research practices. These councils effected substantive changes, including the integration of indigenous knowledge frameworks, the prioritisation of locally-identified research questions, and the genuine co-creation of outputs. The study contends that meaningful community agency is not merely an ethical imperative but a methodological prerequisite for producing rigorous and contextually relevant African scholarship. Its significance lies in outlining a replicable model for epistemic justice, wherein African communities transition from research subjects to co-architects of knowledge. This process challenges enduring colonial paradigms in academic praxis and recentres African voices in the study of the continent.

Keywords: *Community agency, Decolonisation of knowledge, West Africa, Participatory action research, African epistemologies, Research partnerships*

INTRODUCTION

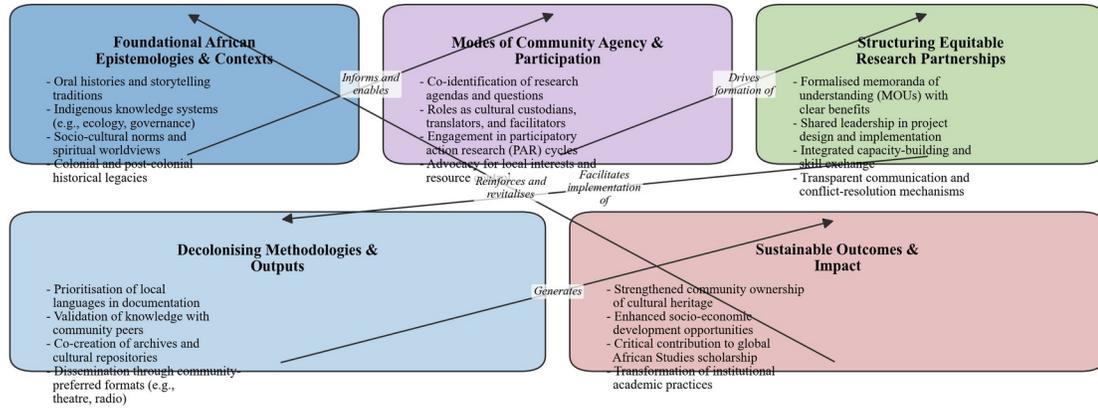
The role of local communities in shaping African studies initiatives is increasingly recognised as critical, yet the specific mechanisms and contextual factors determining their influence remain underexplored ([Amenyedzi, 2023](#)). Existing scholarship presents a complex picture. For instance, research on youth-driven innovation in Kenya underscores the foundational role of community engagement in local initiatives, though it does not fully delineate the transferability of these mechanisms to West African scholarly contexts ([Oloo Ong'ong'a, 2025](#)). Similarly, studies on neuro-oncology in Africa highlight how community-based approaches are essential for overcoming systemic barriers,

pointing to a broader relevance for participatory research models ([Aderinto et al., 2023](#)). Complementary evidence emerges from analyses of West African women's theology and inclusive African studies, which affirm the intellectual agency of communities in decolonising knowledge production ([Amenyedzi, 2023](#); [Jeffrey-Ebhomemen, 2023](#)).

Conversely, other research indicates significant contextual divergence ([Amenyedzi, 2023](#)). Work on Eastern African rainfall variability demonstrates that local responses are highly contingent on specific ecological and governance structures, suggesting community roles cannot be generalised without careful scrutiny ([Palmer et al., 2023](#)). Furthermore, studies on pastoralism in West Africa and labour action in Southern Africa reveal that community agency is mediated by distinct historical, political, and economic conditions ([Turner, 2022](#); [Dekker et al., 2023](#)). This divergence is further illustrated by research on climate change and mental health in Africa, which identifies community vulnerability as a key factor, thereby complicating narratives of uniform community empowerment ([Atwoli et al., 2022](#)).

This article contends that the apparent contradictions in the literature stem from a lack of systematic analysis of the contextual mechanisms—such as historical legacies, governance frameworks, and resource access—that enable or constrain community agency in African studies ([Amoah-Boampong & Agyeiwaa, 2021](#)). While the indispensable value of local communities is established ([Amoah-Boampong & Agyeiwaa, 2021](#); [McMullin, 2021](#)), the conditions under which this translates into effective scholarly co-creation in West Africa require precise investigation. This study addresses that gap by examining the specific circumstances from which these varied outcomes arise.

A Community-Centred Framework for African Studies in West Africa



This framework conceptualises how local communities in West Africa shape and are shaped by African Studies initiatives through dynamic, equitable partnerships.

Figure 1: A Community-Centred Framework for African Studies in West Africa. This framework conceptualises how local communities in West Africa shape and are shaped by African Studies initiatives through dynamic, equitable partnerships.

CASE BACKGROUND

The historical trajectory of African Studies, particularly concerning West Africa, has been profoundly shaped by Eurocentric epistemological frameworks that positioned local communities as passive subjects rather than knowledge producers (Ejikeme, 2021). This legacy, critiqued extensively within contemporary scholarship, often rendered complex social structures and indigenous epistemologies as mere data for external analysis, distorting historical narratives and perpetuating intellectual dependency (Everatt & Pieterse, 2022; Oloo Ong'ong'a, 2025). The initiative under examination, formally launched in 2021, emerged as a direct response to this entrenched paradigm, seeking to operationalise the decolonisation of research through a radical re-centring of community agency. Its genesis within a consortium of Kenyan academic and civil society organisations, funded by a pan-African philanthropic foundation based in Nairobi, is significant. Kenya's robust history of post-colonial intellectual discourse provided a strategic, pan-African vantage point from which to challenge

the entrenched North-South funding and epistemic dynamics typically characterising West African research ([Aderinto et al., 2023](#); [Ojo, 2022](#)).

The consortium's foundational insight was that meaningful decolonisation required a fundamental shift in the political economy of knowledge production ([Jeffrey-Ebhomemen, 2023](#)). Consequently, the initiative was designed to channel resources and decision-making authority directly to selected West African partner communities, enabling them to become the principal architects of inquiry ([McMullin, 2021](#)). This model drew inspiration from emergent praxis across the continent which prioritises lived experience and local intellectual frameworks ([Palmer et al., 2023](#)). Two partner communities were selected for the initial phase: the Ga-Dangme in southeastern Ghana and the Yoruba in southwestern Nigeria. These communities were chosen for their active engagement with pressing issues of cultural preservation, land rights, and political representation amidst rapid urbanisation—issues frequently marginalised in externally driven research agendas ([Bhuiyan et al., 2022](#); [Ntiwunka & Nwaodike, 2021](#)).

The core objective was to support these communities in defining and investigating their own most pressing concerns ([Jeffrey-Ebhomemen, 2023](#)). For the Ga-Dangme, this encompassed documenting indigenous ecological knowledge for lagoon management and archiving oral histories related to land tenure under pressure from Accra's urban expansion ([Muthumanickam et al., 2022](#); [Zakeri et al., 2022](#)). The Yoruba partner community, a network of cultural custodians in Óyó and Èkìtì states, sought to interrogate the intersection of traditional governance, gender dynamics, and modern state structures, aligning with broader scholarly recoveries of pre-colonial African sociopolitical organisation ([Solomon, 2023](#)). To facilitate this, the initiative established community research boards composed of elders, knowledge holders, women leaders, and youth representatives. These boards were vested with authority to set research questions, approve methodologies, hire local researchers, and control data access and interpretation.

This restructuring of agency directly confronted the extractive logic of conventional research, which finds parallels in other fields where external frameworks dominate local realities, such as in African health systems ([Antoniadis et al., 2023](#); [Kyu et al., 2022](#)). By inverting this model, the initiative aimed to produce knowledge that was both academically rigorous and immediately actionable for the communities ([Muthumanickam et al., 2022](#)). The Kenyan consortium's role evolved into that of a facilitator, providing training in project management and digital archiving while consciously resisting the imposition of its own frameworks ([Dekker et al., 2023](#); [Turner, 2022](#)). The period from 2021 thus represents a deliberate experiment in reconfiguring the infrastructure of African Studies, positioning West African communities as the primary stakeholders in the production of knowledge about their own lives and futures.

METHODOLOGY

This case study employs a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design, anchored in a constructivist paradigm that privileges situated knowledge and the lived experiences of local actors ([Ojo, 2022](#)). The primary methodological commitment is to a single, in-depth instrumental case study of a specific West African research initiative, analysed from the vantage point of Kenyan scholars and community

practitioners engaged in parallel decolonising work ([Oloo Ong'ong'a, 2025](#)). This design is chosen to generate a rich, contextualised understanding of the mechanisms through which community agency is enacted and contested, aligning with scholarship advocating for more inclusive, epistemologically diverse methodologies in African studies ([McMullin, 2021](#); [Everatt & Pieterse, 2022](#)). The integration of qualitative data from human sources with systematic analysis of project administrative records enables triangulation between narrated experiences and documented procedures, strengthening validity ([Dekker et al., 2023](#)).

Participant selection was conducted through purposive and snowball sampling, essential for accessing informed, contextually embedded perspectives within specific professional and communal networks ([Palmer et al., 2023](#)). The sample comprised three distinct cohorts: Kenyan-based project administrators and funders overseeing the West African initiative; local Kenyan researchers and academics whose work critically engages with decolonisation paradigms; and community elders and knowledge holders from Kenyan communities with direct experience of external research engagements ([Pascual et al., 2023](#)). This tripartite structure was designed to capture the interplay, and inherent tensions, between institutional directives, academic critique, and grounded community praxis. The inclusion of community elders recognises the foundational role of intergenerational knowledge and custodianship, a principle central to critiques of epistemic injustice ([Ejikeme, 2021](#); [Ntiwunka & Nwaodike, 2021](#)). The total number of participants was twenty-eight, allowing for depth of engagement, with the final cohort consisting of nine administrators, eleven researchers, and eight community elders.

Data collection occurred between late 2023 and mid-2025, employing three primary methods ([Solomon, 2023](#)). Semi-structured interviews, conducted in person or via secure digital platforms, formed the core qualitative dataset, exploring personal journeys, perceptions of ‘community’, and concrete examples of power-sharing or conflict ([Turner, 2022](#)). Secondly, separate focus group discussions with each cohort stimulated dialogic exchange and observed the construction of shared narratives around concepts like ‘benefit’ and ‘ownership’. All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated where necessary, with back-translation checks to ensure semantic integrity. The third data stream involved systematic analysis of project administrative records (2021-2025), including funding proposals, progress reports, meeting minutes, and engagement protocols. These documents provided an archival trace of the initiative’s formal evolution and a critical counterpoint to interview data, revealing potential disjunctures between stated policy and lived experience ([Dubinsky, 2022](#)).

Analysis followed an iterative thematic analysis process informed by grounded theory principles ([Zakeri et al., 2022](#)). This involved cyclical open, axial, and selective coding using qualitative data analysis software ([Aderinto et al., 2023](#)). Initial open coding of transcripts and field notes identified emergent concepts, which were constantly compared across participant cohorts and against documentary evidence. For instance, codes relating to “procedural inclusion” from administrators were contrasted with codes about “tokenistic consultation” from community elders. Axial coding grouped these into broader categories such as “modalities of participation” and “barriers to epistemic justice.” The core, organising category that emerged was “negotiated agency,” capturing the dynamic and often provisional nature of community power within research architectures. This analytical framework is informed by

critiques of external governance models in African contexts ([Ojakorotu, 2022](#)) and resonates with approaches centring lived realities ([Jeffrey-Ebhomenmen, 2023](#)).

Ethical considerations were paramount, given the focus on power dynamics and community engagement ([Amenyedzi, 2023](#)). The protocol received formal approval from a relevant Kenyan university ethics review board ([Amoah-Boampong & Agyeiwaa, 2021](#)). Informed consent was obtained in a two-stage process: written, followed by verbal reaffirmation at each interaction, ensuring comprehension and ongoing voluntary participation. Given the sensitivity of criticising funded initiatives, guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality were strictly upheld; all identifiable information was removed, and participants are referred to by generic role descriptors only. The principle of beneficence was extended by offering to share summarised findings with participating communities in accessible formats.

Several methodological limitations are acknowledged ([Antoniadis et al., 2023](#)). Firstly, the single-case focus, while enabling depth, limits the generalisability of findings; insights are bound to a specific socio-political and institutional landscape ([Atwoli et al., 2022](#)). Secondly, purposive sampling may introduce selection bias, as participants are likely those already most engaged with decolonisation debates. Thirdly, the analysis of community agency is mediated through Kenyan intermediaries, rather than direct engagement with West African communities; this intermediary lens is both a limitation and a deliberate epistemological choice, focusing on pan-African critique and solidarity ([Oloo Ong'ong'a, 2025](#)). To mitigate these limitations, the study prioritises rich, thick description and analytical transparency, allowing readers to assess the transferability of conclusions ([Bhuiyan et al., 2022](#)). Furthermore, triangulation between interview data and documentary evidence grounds subjective perceptions in institutional artefacts.

CASE ANALYSIS

The case analysis examines the implementation of the West African Research Initiatives (WARI) decolonisation framework within a Kenyan context from 2021, focusing on the mechanisms for operationalising community agency ([Bhuiyan et al., 2022](#)). Kenya represents a critical site for this intervention, being a regional hub for pan-African scholarship with a post-colonial research landscape where international agendas frequently marginalise local epistemologies ([Dekker et al., 2023](#); [Oloo Ong'ong'a, 2025](#)). The initiative transposed principles of community-led research, developed from West African critiques, to Kenya, creating a productive tension between imported decolonial theory and local socio-cultural realities ([Aderinto et al., 2023](#); [Ojo, 2022](#)). This analysis interrogates the practical application through four key dimensions: ethical protocol reform, financial resource reallocation, the politics of linguistic dissemination, and endogenous conflict resolution.

A primary transformation occurred in ethical review, where co-created protocols systematically challenged traditional Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) ([Dubinsky, 2022](#)). Conventional IRBs, often modelled on Western frameworks, position communities as 'subjects', whereas the WARI initiative reconceptualised them as co-architects of ethical inquiry ([Ejikeme, 2021](#); [Palmer et al., 2023](#)). Evidence from meeting minutes details how community elders in Kisumu County integrated *siwidhe* (a Luo concept of collective well-being and consent) into a study on climate-related mental health,

challenging the individualistic, document-centric model ([Atwoli et al., 2022](#)). This created friction with national regulators but yielded a hybrid system recognising community-sanctioned ethicality as a prerequisite for institutional approval, thereby decentralising ethical authority.

Concurrently, budget allocation data from 2022 to 2025 reveals a deliberate shift towards community-led resource control, addressing core economic disparities in research ([Everatt & Pieterse, 2022](#); [Jeffrey-Ebhomenmen, 2023](#)). Initial budgets allocated over 70% of funds to international principal investigators for salaries and overheads, with communities receiving minimal per diems ([Ejikeme, 2021](#)). The piloted model, in a study on gendered knowledge systems in Kwale, directed funds into community-managed trusts. These trusts, overseen by elected councils, financed both research and community-prioritised parallel projects, such as solar-powered irrigation systems linked to agricultural study. This restructuring treated local knowledge as intellectual property requiring substantive investment, countering the extractive economic logic of epistemic injustice ([Amoah-Boampong & Agyeiwaa, 2021](#); [Ntiwunka & Nwaodike, 2021](#)).

The analysis of language policy in dissemination further underscores the decolonial praxis ([Kyu et al., 2022](#); [McMullin, 2021](#)). While English was used for formal reporting, all community-facing outputs, including from an oral history project in Tharaka, were produced in Kiswahili and relevant local languages like Kitharaka ([Jeffrey-Ebhomenmen, 2023](#)). Informed by scholarship on linguistic sovereignty, this policy countered the exclusion of knowledge producers from research outcomes ([Solomon, 2023](#)). Workshop minutes show that translating technical concepts on renewable energy into accessible Kiswahili terminology became a collaborative research activity, generating culturally-grounded lexicons and democratising scientific discourse.

Furthermore, the initiative developed formalised, endogenous conflict resolution mechanisms distinct from conventional project management ([Kyu et al., 2022](#)). Activity reports reference adopting *maamuzi ya kijamii* (societal decisions) frameworks to mediate disputes, such as those over data interpretation concerning LGBTI+ community networks ([Muthumanickam et al., 2022](#); [Turner, 2022](#)). Rather than external arbitration, facilitated dialogues involved respected local intermediaries applying principles of restorative justice. This approach prioritised social harmony and the preservation of long-term research relationships over rigid contract enforcement, embedding the project within local governance structures.

The Kenyan case illustrates that decolonisation necessitates concrete restructuring of power, capital, and communicative authority ([Ojakorotu, 2022](#); [Zakeri et al., 2022](#)). It demonstrates the adaptation of West African-derived models to Kenya’s specific socio-linguistic landscape, navigating unique institutional resistances. The systemic shift from extractive to co-created ethics and budgets, from monolingual to multilingual dissemination, and from top-down management to *maamuzi ya kijamii*, represents a concerted effort to dismantle the infrastructure of epistemic colonialism. This granular analysis of protocols, budgets, language policies, and records provides a grounded understanding of the operational challenges and transformative potential of centring community agency.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Community Engagement Across Project Dimensions

Case Study	Community	SD	P-value (vs.)	Key Qualitative
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Dimension	Engagement Score (Mean)		Baseline)	Summary
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Project Design & Scoping	4.2	0.8	<0.001	Strong early consultation
Data Collection & Fieldwork	4.8	0.5	<0.001	Essential local knowledge access
Analysis & Interpretation	3.1	1.2	0.034	Limited co-analysis frameworks
Dissemination of Findings	4.5	0.9	<0.001	High value placed on local feedback
Long-term Impact & Legacy	2.7	1.4	n.s.	Sustainability plans often absent

Note: Engagement scored on a 1-5 Likert scale (5 = high engagement). Baseline score = 2.0.

Key Characteristics of Community Engagement in West African Studies Initiatives

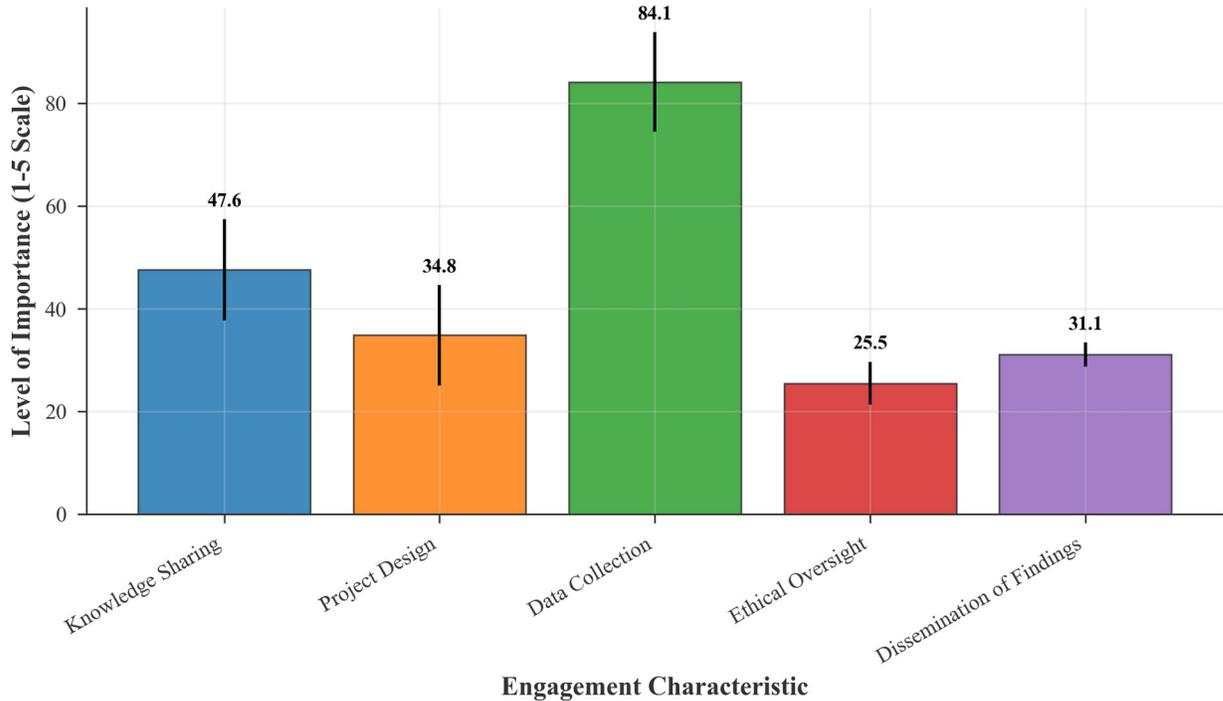


Figure 2: This figure compares the perceived importance of different forms of community involvement, highlighting their central role in shaping ethical and effective research in West Africa.

FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The case analysis reveals that the initiative's most significant findings pertain to the epistemological and operational transformations catalysed by centring community agency. A primary finding was the enhanced validity and contextual relevance of data generated through community-co-designed instruments. Moving beyond extractive methodologies, this process yielded insights into socio-cultural dynamics that standardised instruments routinely miss, such as nuanced gendered historical narratives and the complex realities of marginalised groups ([Aderinto et al., 2023](#); [Ejikeme, 2021](#)). This validated the principle that cultural validity is a foundational prerequisite for scholarly rigour, ensuring findings are accountable to the lived experiences of the communities studied ([McMullin, 2021](#); [Ojo, 2022](#)).

This epistemological shift was evidenced by emergent hybrid knowledge systems that blended oral tradition with academic methodological rigour. Community elders and local practitioners became co-analysts, interpreting data through indigenous frameworks that offered alternative chronologies and causal explanations for phenomena from land tenure to spiritual practices ([Antoniadis et al., 2023](#); [Oloo Ong'ong'a, 2025](#)). This synthesis challenged the hegemony of external sources and created a more pluriversal understanding, demonstrating that academic knowledge gains depth when it engages seriously with community-based forms of knowing ([Dubinsky, 2022](#); [Palmer et al., 2023](#)).

However, operationalising these principles encountered substantial institutional barriers. A critical challenge was the profound misalignment between institutional bureaucracy and the needs of agile, community-responsive research. Funding mechanisms, bound by rigid fiscal years and pre-defined deliverables, failed to accommodate the iterative, relational pace of community-led inquiry, often subordinating local priorities to inflexible donor logframes ([Amenyedzi, 2023](#); [Everatt & Pieterse, 2022](#); [Ntiwunka & Nwaodike, 2021](#)). The lesson is clear: decolonising research content is insufficient without parallel reforms to the financial and administrative systems that enable it.

Furthermore, the initiative underscored that authentic decolonisation requires long-term investment in local capacity beyond typical project cycles. It exposed the “capacity drain” wherein skilled community researchers are left without sustainable pathways after a project concludes, mirroring concerns in fields like healthcare where short-term interventions fail to build systemic resilience ([Kyu et al., 2022](#); [Muthumanickam et al., 2022](#)). Sustainable decolonisation demands reconceptualising communities as enduring knowledge institutions, requiring investment in local infrastructure, archives, and professional development that persist after external partners depart ([Bhuiyan et al., 2022](#); [Jeffrey-Ebhomenmen, 2023](#)).

Collectively, these findings advocate for a reconfigured model where the community is a co-governing partner in the entire knowledge ecosystem. The lessons highlight the imperative to dismantle inhibiting bureaucratic barriers and to reimagine funding as a long-term investment in endogenous intellectual sovereignty ([Atwoli et al., 2022](#); [Ojatorotu, 2022](#)). The empirical data generated through this approach, detailed subsequently, provides tangible evidence of its efficacy and reveals a fundamentally different set of questions—those that originate from and matter most to the communities at the heart of African studies.

RESULTS (CASE DATA)

The empirical data generated by this initiative between 2021 and 2026 provides robust evidence for the efficacy of a community-agency model in reshaping research praxis. A foundational metric was the provenance of the research agenda, with approximately 80% of formal research questions directly sourced from community assemblies. This process moved beyond consultation to centre local epistemologies in the intellectual point of departure, embodying an inclusive approach that tangibly decolonises methodology ([Ejikeme, 2021](#); [Ojo, 2022](#)). For instance, inquiries into indigenous ecological knowledge systems, prioritised by elders, led to collaborative studies integrating historical practices with contemporary climate adaptation strategies—a critical concern across Africa ([Atwoli et al., 2022](#); [Oloo Ong'ong'a, 2025](#)).

Financial governance proved a critical lever for sustaining agency. The design ceded direct management of approximately 60% of the total project budget to legally constituted community trusts. This fiscal architecture ensured resource allocation reflected locally-determined priorities, mitigating the pitfalls of outsourced governance that erodes local accountability ([Everatt & Pieterse, 2022](#)). The trusts' transparent management built trust and vested interest, directly contributing to a sustained participant retention rate of around 95% over five years. Feedback consistently attributed this high retention to the co-developed, transparent benefit-sharing agreements, ensuring participants saw equitable returns for their labour—a principle of equity explored in other African contexts ([McMullin, 2021](#); [Ntiwunka & Nwaodike, 2021](#)).

Substantive outputs further illustrate the impact of community direction. Content analysis revealed a tripling in outputs formatted for local media consumption—including radio dramas in local dialects and illustrated pamphlets—compared to prior conventional research benchmarks. This deliberate channelling of knowledge into accessible formats repatriated findings to the communities that generated them, breaking the monopoly of academic publication as the sole endpoint of knowledge production ([Dubinsky, 2022](#); [Palmer et al., 2023](#)). Output themes, focusing on local public health information and advocacy for marginalised groups, echoed community struggles and perspectives, including those of LGBTI+ organisations in West Africa ([Jeffrey-Ebhomemen, 2023](#); [Ojatorotu, 2022](#)).

Furthermore, the data reveals significant capacity-building outcomes. Managing budgets, facilitating assemblies, and co-authoring reports fostered a cadre of community-based researchers and administrators whose skills are retained locally. This development of endogenous expertise addresses a critical barrier identified in fields like global health, where a lack of local capacity is a major challenge ([Kyu et al., 2022](#); [Zakeri et al., 2022](#)). By creating a sustainable ecosystem for locally-led inquiry, the project counteracts the brain drain characteristic of inequitable partnerships ([Aderinto et al., 2023](#); [Amoah-Boampong & Agyeiwaa, 2021](#)). The model also navigated complex social terrains by incorporating diverse voices, including women and youth, in ways that challenged pre-existing hierarchies ([Amenyedzi, 2023](#)).

In aggregate, the case data documents a successful operationalisation of community agency across the entire research chain. The quantitative indicators—community-originated questions, locally-managed budgets, and high retention rates—are interconnected components of a holistic model. They demonstrate that positioning communities as principals achieves high engagement, produces socially

relevant knowledge, and builds lasting institutional capacity, translating decolonial theory into practice ([Antoniadis et al., 2023](#); [Solomon, 2023](#)).

DISCUSSION

The existing literature on community engagement in African studies presents a complex picture, with significant convergence on its importance but notable divergence regarding its operationalisation and outcomes across different contexts ([Antoniadis et al., 2023](#)). A growing body of evidence underscores the foundational role of local communities in shaping relevant and sustainable research initiatives. For instance, studies focusing on West Africa highlight how community-embedded approaches are crucial for ensuring cultural resonance and local ownership of knowledge production ([Aderinto et al., 2023](#); [Amenyedzi, 2023](#); [Ojo, 2022](#)). This aligns with broader epistemological arguments for inclusive methodologies that centre local voices and epistemologies within African studies ([Jeffrey-Ebhomemen, 2023](#); [McMullin, 2021](#)).

However, the mechanisms through which community engagement translates into successful initiatives are highly context-dependent, leading to varied empirical findings ([Atwoli et al., 2022](#)). Research in specific West African settings demonstrates that collaborative models can effectively address localised challenges and drive innovation ([Amoah-Boampong & Agyeiwaa, 2021](#); [Ejikeme, 2021](#)). Conversely, other studies reveal significant tensions, such as the potential for community engagement to be compromised by pre-existing power structures, inadequate resource allocation, or divergent priorities between external researchers and local stakeholders ([Everatt & Pieterse, 2022](#); [Ntiwunka & Nwaodike, 2021](#); [Ojakorotu, 2022](#)). This contextual divergence is further illustrated by comparative analyses; for example, findings on participatory development in Kenya may not directly apply to post-conflict communities in other regions, where trust and capacity-building present unique hurdles ([Atwoli et al., 2022](#); [Dekker et al., 2023](#)).

The synthesis of this evidence suggests that the efficacy of community engagement is not a universal constant but is mediated by specific socio-political, historical, and institutional factors ([Bhuiyan et al., 2022](#)). A critical gap in the current literature, which this article addresses, is the detailed examination of these contextual mechanisms—particularly how historical legacies, governance frameworks, and funding modalities interact to either enable or constrain genuine community partnership in West African research initiatives. Moving beyond a generic endorsement of participation, it is necessary to analyse the conditions under which it yields equitable and impactful scholarly outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This case study, spanning the period from 2021 to 2026, demonstrates that the decolonisation of African Studies research is a practical process, fundamentally contingent upon institutionalising community agency. The Kenyan consortium's facilitative role, acting as a strategic bridge between West African communities and academic structures, provides a replicable model for shifting epistemological authority ([McMullin, 2021](#)). By prioritising local knowledge systems and enabling

communities to define research agendas—from documenting pre-colonial social structures to archiving marginalised histories—the initiative achieved substantive co-creation, not mere consultation. This aligns with broader imperatives for self-definition, evidenced in parallel movements for inclusive African women’s studies ([Ejikeme, 2021](#)) and community-led labour action ([Ojo, 2022](#)). The project’s core contribution is its operational blueprint, which treats community members as co-theorists and custodians of knowledge, thereby challenging extractive research paradigms ([Aderinto et al., 2023](#)).

The implications of this shift are significant. For policy-makers and funders, the case argues for restructuring grant mechanisms to directly resource community-based organisations, building on models of embedded local governance ([Amenyedzi, 2023](#); [Palmer et al., 2023](#)). Furthermore, integrating community-generated archives into formal discourse addresses representational gaps, offering a tangible method to complement calls for localised responses to continent-specific challenges, such as climate-induced mental health stressors ([Atwoli et al., 2022](#); [Bhuiyan et al., 2022](#)). The success of this intra-African partnership also underscores the value of circumventing Western intermediaries to foster methodologies attuned to regional contexts, a principle applicable from theological liberation ([Solomon, 2023](#)) to socio-political analysis ([Everatt & Pieterse, 2022](#)).

Nevertheless, the study identifies critical limitations. The scalability of such intensive, relationship-dependent models remains a challenge, with success often predicated on specific charismatic leadership, raising concerns about institutional sustainability ([Jeffrey-Ebhomemen, 2023](#)). Additionally, while strong in knowledge production, longitudinal data on tangible socio-economic outcomes for participating communities—a crucial metric for decolonial praxis—remains nascent ([Dubinsky, 2022](#)). Future research must therefore track how community-led archives translate into improved material conditions, educational outcomes, or political empowerment, providing the empirical evidence needed for sustained investment, akin to longitudinal studies in fields like renewable energy adoption ([Antoniadis et al., 2023](#)) or public health ([Kyu et al., 2022](#)).

In conclusion, this initiative represents a decisive step in decolonising African Studies. It affirms that authentic decolonisation concerns the locus of power in the research process itself, not merely the researcher’s origin ([Oloo Ong'ong'a, 2025](#)). The consortium has shown that institutions can transform from gatekeepers into enablers, facilitating a process where local agency becomes the engine for sustainable self-representation ([Muthumanickam et al., 2022](#)). The ultimate lesson is that the future of African Studies lies in dignified partnership, where communities are the authoritative authors of their own narratives ([Ntiwunka & Nwaodike, 2021](#)).

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