# Reframing Knowledge Production through Ubuntu: An African Paradigm for Research and Governance

**Bongani June Mwale[1*], Mfanelo Ntsobib[2]**

Sci-Bono Discovery Centre Cnr Mirriam Makeba and Lillian Ngoyi Street, Newtown – Johannesburg, South Africa

***Corresponding author:** Bongani June Mwale

Sci-Bono Discovery Centre Cnr Mirriam Makeba and Lillian Ngoyi Street, Newtown – Johannesburg, South Africa

## Abstract

*Western epistemological traditions that prioritise individualism, objectivity, and methodological detachment continue to shape knowledge production within African universities and research institutions. These paradigms have enriched global scholarship, yet they frequently neglect the relational, communal, and ethical foundations that characterise African social realities. In response to persistent demands for decolonisation and epistemological justice, this article promotes Ubuntu as a coherent and justifiable research paradigm rooted in Southern epistemologies. Drawing on qualitative, Ubuntu-informed inquiry and extensive theoretical engagement, the study conceptualises Ubuntu beyond its common framing as a moral philosophy and instead positions it as a paradigmatic framework integrating ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. The study was conducted in environments that reflect African communal life, including academic institutions, cultural venues, and community organisations that embody Ubuntu values, allowing participants to articulate their lived experience of the Ubuntu philosophical construct. This demonstrates how Ubuntu can be operationalised in empirical research through intentional community engagement, co-development of research processes, collaborative analysis, and reciprocal dissemination of findings. It critically examines the benefits and limitations of adopting an Ubuntu-based paradigm, acknowledging challenges related to institutional acceptance, methodological standardisation, and risks of romanticisation. The study further positions Ubuntu as a normative framework for leadership and governance, illustrated through South Africa's inclusive leadership during the G20 under SA chairpersonship. The article concludes that Ubuntu offers a transformative contribution to global scholarship by recanting Southern epistemologies, advancing epistemic justice, and providing a humanising paradigm for ethical research, leadership, and governance in an interconnected world. The recommendations advocate for the advancement of Ubuntu as a research paradigm that enhances Southern knowledge and serves as a framework for global governance and multilateralism.*

**Keywords:** *Ubuntu, Southern Epistemologies, Decolonisation of Knowledge, Indigenous Research Paradigms, Epistemic Justice, Dialogic Methods*

# 1. Introduction

African academic institutions continue to produce knowledge within frameworks influenced by Western methodological and philosophical traditions. These imported paradigms are helpful in many situations, but they frequently fail to capture the relational ethics, worldviews, and sociocultural realities that form the foundation of African life. As a result, there is still a persistent epistemic imbalance in which African scholars use methods that may not be compatible with Indigenous ways of knowing to address issues pertinent to their societies. Indigenous epistemologies like Ubuntu are receiving more attention as potential foundations for African-centered research paradigms as the call for decolonising research grows throughout the continent (Webb et al., 2024; Masenya, 2022)

Ubuntu emphasises interconnectedness, group well-being, and shared responsibility. It is embodied in the maxim "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," which means "a person is a person through other persons." In many Southern African societies, it has affected leadership, moral behaviour, community governance, and conflict resolution. Ubuntu is more than just an ethical framework when considered as a research paradigm. It uses relational and communal lenses to reframe ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. This article makes the case that Ubuntu, when properly understood, offers a strong decolonial paradigm that supports global epistemic pluralism and aligns research with African lived realities (Anofuechi & Klaasen, 2024; Magezi & Khlopa, 2021).

The article goes on to describe the background and context that support the need for an Indigenous paradigm, explain the conceptual and ethical underpinnings of Ubuntu, and situate it within larger Southern epistemologies. After that, it introduces Ubuntu as a paradigm for research, examines how it might be put into practice, lists its advantages, and points out any potential drawbacks. Recommendations for integrating Ubuntu into African scholarship are provided in the paper's conclusion.

## 1.1 Context and Background

The African research landscape is still greatly influenced by Eurocentric epistemic traditions that were brought about by colonialism and institutionalised through higher education systems. Individualism, objectivity, and the hierarchical division between the researcher and the researched are emphasised by these traditions. Because of this, a lot of African academics use paradigms that have little cultural resonance, which can result in knowledge that is out of step with the realities of the community (Mutongoza et al., 2023; Cross & Govender, 2021).

Southern epistemologies promote contextually grounded knowledge systems in order to counteract this disparity. They contend that relational, communal, spiritual, and experiential ways of knowing that have long existed outside the Western canon must be acknowledged and validated in global scholarship. This intellectual movement includes Ubuntu, which presents a worldview in which reality and knowledge creation are founded on human dignity, interconnectedness, and collective meaning-making (Ntsobi, 2024; Ntsobi, 2022; De & Santos, 2014). However, Ubuntu is still not widely used as a formal paradigm in research, despite its philosophical depth.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Ubuntu has been widely acknowledged and valued as a cultural ethical and moral philosophy, but its application as a structured research paradigm is constrained, inconsistent, and occasionally superficial. Research in Africa is still largely dependent on Western paradigms, which might not be representative of regional values or epistemic customs. The ways in which Ubuntu can influence ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, as well as how it can be operationalised in academic research, are not well expressed. Ubuntu runs the risk of being misinterpreted as a cultural catchphrase rather than a rigorous paradigm in the absence of such articulation. In order to close this gap, this paper methodically develops Ubuntu as a paradigm for research (Patel et al., 2024; Ewuoso & Hall, 2019).

## 1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Conceptualise Ubuntu as a coherent research paradigm situated within Southern epistemologies.

2. Analyse the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological foundations that underpin Ubuntu as a research paradigm.

3. Demonstrate the operationalisation of Ubuntu in empirical research while critically evaluating its benefits, contributions, and limitations.

4. Provide recommendations for strengthening Indigenous paradigms in African research contexts.

## 1.4 Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What is Ubuntu, and how can it be conceptualised as a research paradigm?

2. How do Ubuntu's ontological, epistemological, and axiological principles shape knowledge production?

3. In what ways can Ubuntu be operationalised in empirical research, and how does its application reveal its benefits, contributions, and limitations as a research paradigm?

4. How can Ubuntu contribute to epistemic justice and the decolonisation of research in Africa?

## 1.5 Rationale and Significance

This study contributes to ongoing discussions on decolonisation by presenting a fully developed Indigenous paradigm based on African philosophies. Ubuntu offers contextual significance for African research, bolsters ethical responsibility, fosters community-oriented investigation, and promotes theoretical advancement in the Global South. It allows scholars to create knowledge that accurately represents African reality and to contest epistemic hierarchies that exclude non-Western perspectives. The study is significant for curriculum transformation, methodological diversity, and bolstering autonomy of African scholarly (Marovah & Mutanga, 2023; Bhuda et al., 2022; Buaku-Igwe & Matebeni, 2021)

# 2. Literature Review

## 2.1 Ubuntu: Philosophy and Foundations

Ubuntu has been treated as the moral quality of a human being, as a way of thinking, a philosophy, or an ethic, as African humanism, and as a world perspective. Ubuntu became noteworthy ideationally during times of political upheaval and the demise of racist regimes in Southern Africa. Ubuntu is associated with a political way of thinking or belief system, a contention

unequivocally linked to the transformation from White minority rule to Black majority rule, in Zimbabwe and South Africa in particular (Patel et al., 2024).

Ubuntu is a philosophical and ethical perspective from Southern Africa that views morality, personhood, and knowledge as essentially relational and communal. According to academic literature, umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, or "a person is a person through other persons," is a common way to express the idea that human existence and agency are constituted through interconnectedness. Ubuntu is a normative framework that places ethical action and knowledge production within lived social relationships rather than isolated individualism. It emphasises human dignity, mutual recognition, empathy, reciprocity, and collective responsibility. Ubuntu is a relational paradigm that advances socially grounded, restorative, and inclusive practice in research, leadership, and governance by integrating ontology (being-with-others), epistemology (knowledge as co-created), and axiology (ethics of care and justice) (Asiimwe, 2023; Lumumba, 2023; Magezi & Khlopa, 2021; Metz, 2011).

Ubuntu is a relational philosophy that has its roots in African sociocultural customs. It places a strong emphasis on reciprocity, interconnectedness, collective identity, dignity, and peaceful cohabitation. Ubuntu has historically influenced shared responsibility, restorative justice, moral behaviour, and community governance in precolonial African societies. Its current resurgence reflects both intellectual opposition to Eurocentrism and cultural resiliency. The fundamental tenets of Ubuntu—relational personhood, respect, reciprocity, and communal solidarity—form a worldview in which social relationships are the means by which an individual's identity develops. Ubuntu is a moral, social, and cosmological system in which people, ancestors, the land, and spiritual forces form interconnected realities. It is more than just an ethic. Ubuntu is in a unique position to function as a paradigm for research because of its comprehensive foundation (Guy, 2025; Ngcobo et al., 2025).

### 2.2 Global Knowledge

Global knowledge production is still structurally shaped by Western epistemologies, which place a high value on individualism, objectivity, and positivist traditions. In the Global South, these paradigms still have an impact on scholarly authority, publication standards, research training, and knowledge validation. Indigenous knowledge systems have frequently been suppressed by this dominance in the African context, leading to epistemic marginalisation and a lack of representation of African intellectual traditions in mainstream academic discourse. Ubuntu, a relational and communal philosophy with roots in Southern African worldviews, has become a compelling alternative research paradigm as calls for decolonisation and epistemic justice grow in African scholarship (Aziz & Anjum, 2025; Shizha, 2017).

Ubuntu provides an ontological and epistemological framework that is consistent with African ways of knowing, emphasising interconnectedness, reciprocity, care, and communal well-being. Ubuntu is a research paradigm that redefines the production, validation, and dissemination of knowledge by emphasising co-construction of knowledge, collective meaning-making, and relational ethics. This essay argues for Ubuntu's potential to revitalise African intellectual agency in international scholarship while placing it within larger Southern epistemologies. The paper illustrates how Ubuntu can function as a transformative paradigm capable of advancing a more inclusive, pluralistic, and contextually grounded research landscape through conceptual, theoretical, and methodological investigation (Ikpeh & Awi, 2025; Udah et al., 2025).

### 2.3 Ethical Foundations of Ubuntu

According to the literature on Ubuntu ethics, moral behaviour is not individualistic or merely procedural, but rather essentially relational, communal, and responsibility driven. Ubuntu ethics, which are based on the idea that relationships shape personhood, demand relational accountability, respect for one another, empathy, and shared accountability among researchers, participants, and communities. Therefore, ethical behaviour is ingrained in continuing social relationships that require care, attention, and moral responsiveness throughout the research process rather than being restricted to adherence to institutional review boards or formal consent protocols (Anofuechi & Klaasen, 202; Ewuoso & Hall, 2019).

Scholars emphasise that community consent is complementary to individual consent within an Ubuntu ethical framework; they acknowledge elders, gatekeepers, and community institutions as legitimate ethical stakeholders. In contrast to extractive research traditions that prioritise the researcher's authority over collective knowledge systems, knowledge produced through research is understood as co-owned. This approach establishes reciprocity as a fundamental ethical prerequisite, requiring researchers to make sure that research findings benefit participating communities both materially and intangibly, whether through knowledge exchange, capacity building, or social advancement (Appiah et al., 2024; Akpa-Inyang & Chima, 2021).

Additionally, Ubuntu ethics emphasises restorative justice, especially in settings that have been shaped by marginalisation, historical exploitation, and epistemic injustice. Therefore, acknowledging past wrongs, resolving power disparities, and helping to rebuild dignity and trust are all part of ethical research practice. By acknowledging that ethical sensitivity is inextricably linked to contextual understanding, researchers are expected to respect cultural norms, languages, and values. Crucially, the literature presents ethical practice as an ongoing relational process that develops over the course of the research and frequently goes beyond its official conclusion rather than as a one-time procedural checkpoint. This idea reinforces Ubuntu's significance as a moral philosophy and a useful ethical framework for current research by redefining ethics as lived responsibility (Marovah & Mutanga, 2023).

### 2.4 Ubuntu Role in Post-Colonial South Africa

South Africa is a nation burdened by profound collective trauma. The institutionalised racism of apartheid was terrible for most people. Despite the terrible and oppressive system, many of those who were most impacted by it fought back, stayed strong, and came together. Some people say that the philosophical idea of ubuntu guided them (Sithole, 2023).



*Figure 1:  A Proudly South African Philosophy*

The fractal representation of South Africa's first democratic president, who promoted Ubuntu as a cornerstone of the country's democracy, is depicted in the above figure. Nelson Mandela promoted a rainbow nation, stressing that South Africans should rise above their history and preserve the principles of justice, equity, and equality in order to promote peaceful cohabitation, regardless of racial, gender, political, or economic change (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2024; Judges Matter, 2016). Nelson Mandela, the first democratically elected president of South Africa, summarised different interpretations of Ubuntu as an African concept that represents "the profound sense that we are human only through the humanity of others; that if we are to accomplish anything in this world, it will in equal measure be due to the work and achievements of others" (Thompson, 2020).

More than 20 years after apartheid ended, Ubuntu is still widely used in South Africa. The Nguni languages of Zulu and Xhosa are the source of this brief term, which has the broad English meaning of "a quality that embodies the fundamental human virtues of compassion and humanity" (Patel et al., 2024). In modern South Africa, it is often condensed and used by politicians, public figures, and the general public as a general term for the country's moral values, sense of solidarity, ability to work together towards a common goal, or to indicate instances of humanity (Vorster, 2024; Inclusive Society Institute, 2020).

### 2.5 Southern Epistemologies: A Decolonial Turn

Southern epistemologies contest Eurocentric universality by claiming the validity of Indigenous, relational, and contextual knowledge systems. They deal with epistemic injustices brought about by colonial histories, which marginalised or devalued African voices and worldviews. Ubuntu's dedication to pluralism, relationality, and contextualised knowledge is consistent with Southern epistemologies. Ubuntu is intellectually similar to Indigenous North American cosmologies, Latin American decolonial thought, and Pacific relational epistemologies, all of which acknowledge communal identity and holistic worldviews. As a result, Ubuntu supports the worldwide endeavour of pluriversality, or the coexistence of various epistemological traditions (Ntsobi, 2024; Pratt & Vries, 2023).

### 2.6 Ubuntu in Empirical Research

Ubuntu, an African humanist philosophy based on relationality, communal interdependence, and shared humanity ("umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"), can be operationalised in empirical research by converting its ethical and epistemological tenets into practical methodological procedures (Makhanya, 2025).

The Ubuntu paradigm places more emphasis on group meaning making than on the creation of extractive knowledge. Participatory action research (PAR), community-based research, and co-creation approaches—where participants are acknowledged as co-researchers rather than passive subjects—are examples of participatory and community-engaged methodologies that accomplish this. Second, Ubuntu's dialogical ethos is reflected in data collection techniques. Focus groups, storytelling, oral histories, and indaba-style dialogues are some of the methods used to prioritise lived experiences, shared narratives, and group reflection. These techniques promote reciprocity, mutual respect, and trust between participants and researchers (Kapuire, 2023; Padayachee et al., 2023).

In the Ubuntu context, relational ethics are considered in addition to procedural compliance. Ethics in an Ubuntu-informed study places a strong emphasis on community responsibility, respect, dignity, and care. While beneficence and confidentiality are conceptualised in relation to the welfare of the community, informed consent is seen as an ongoing relational process. Lastly, data analysis and distribution are conducted with community accountability. In order to satisfy Ubuntu's moral requirement of reciprocity and shared benefit, findings are interpreted collaboratively when feasible, verified by member checking, and distributed in easily accessible formats that benefit the participants (Bilotta, 2022).

## 3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology informed by Ubuntu that is based on Indigenous African paradigmatic commitments and Southern epistemologies. The methodology's approach to design, sampling, data collection, analysis, ethical practice, and validation reflects Ubuntu's emphasis on relationality, collective meaning-making, and shared humanity. The methodology's goal is to embody Ubuntu in the research process itself, in addition to producing knowledge about it. This design demonstrates how Ubuntu-based research places more emphasis on community interpretation, depth, context, and dialogue than on objective measurement (Grobler & Powell, 2025; Borti et al., 2024).

The research was conducted in environments that reflect African communal life, including academic institutions, cultural venues, and community organisations that embody Ubuntu values. Participants articulated their actual experiences instead of abstract philosophical positions in these contexts, yielding conclusions grounded in both practice and perspective (Mathebula & Martinez-Vargas, 2023).

The population consisted of fifteen people who had firsthand knowledge of Ubuntu as a social practice and a philosophy. This included representatives from non-governmental organisations and institutions that intentionally use Ubuntu-informed approaches in their programs and interventions; educators and academic scholars theorising and teaching Ubuntu-informed perspectives; community development practitioners putting Ubuntu principles into practice; and community elders and cultural custodians who preserve and transmit indigenous knowledge systems (Mpofu & Sefotho, 2024).

To find participants who could describe experiences that were informed by Ubuntu, a purposive sampling technique was employed. Snowball sampling was used in conjunction with this to allow participants to suggest others who had pertinent knowledge in accordance with networks of shared trust. Participants told stories about themselves and their communities. Meaning was able to develop holistically through storytelling with sampled elders, capturing cultural nuance, emotions, values, and symbolism. Additionally, the researcher observed cultural engagement and behaviours, relational dynamics, and events that promoted community cohesion and sharing. Interpretive insights were recorded through reflexive journaling (Smet et al., 2025; Lebese et al., 2023; Stevenson, 2018).

## 4. Ubuntu as a Research Paradigm

### 4.1 Ontology: Relational Being

Ubuntu's ontological foundation is rooted in the assertion that human existence is fundamentally relational, encapsulated in the principle widely accepted as a south African Nguni expression "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu.*" According to this perspective, people are made up of dynamic relationships with others, the community, and the larger social environment rather than existing as separate, independent entities. As a result, reality is viewed as communal rather than atomistic, where social phenomena, meaning, and identity are formed via interaction, interdependence, and shared experience. This ontological position modifies the understanding and study of social reality for research purposes by focussing on relationships, networks, collective practices, and social processes rather than individualised units of analysis. As a result, knowledge claims are based on lived communal contexts, supporting the idea that comprehending social phenomena necessitates interacting with the relational structures that uphold social order and human life (Chigangaidze et al., 2021).

### 4.2 Epistemology: Knowledge Through Community

According to an Ubuntu paradigm, knowledge is created and validated by society through shared lived experiences, collective memory, storytelling, and long-term conversation. Knowing is a relational process through which meaning is jointly created and validated within the community rather than an individual cognitive act. Therefore, consensus, relational coherence, and contextual relevance are the foundations of communal rather than individual epistemic validity. Hierarchies that favour written or positivist forms of knowledge are challenged by the recognition of oral traditions, narratives, proverbs, and experiential knowledge as valid and authoritative epistemic sources. By consolidating voices, experiences, and wisdom that have historically been marginalised within dominant knowledge systems, this epistemological orientation upholds indigenous ways of knowing and strengthens Ubuntu's contribution to epistemic justice (Vandeyar & Mohale, 2022).

### 4.3 Axiology: Values Guiding Research

Ubuntu asserts that responsibility to others and inquiry are inextricably linked, placing moral and ethical principles at the centre of the research endeavour. Compassion, human dignity, honesty, respect for one another, and the desire for peaceful coexistence serve as the foundation for research conducted within an Ubuntu paradigm. Research design, interpretation, and dissemination are all influenced by these values. Because ethical decision-making is relational and context-sensitive, researchers must treat participants and communities with compassion, honesty, and accountability. Ubuntu reframes inquiry as a moral practice focused on social justice and collective well-being rather than a neutral or purely technical exercise by integrating values throughout the research process (Anofuechi & Klaasen, 2022).

### 4.4 Methodology: Participatory, Dialogic, and Immersive

Ubuntu promotes participatory, dialogic, and immersive research methodologies in keeping with its focus on interpersonal interaction and group meaning-making. Ubuntu-informed approaches involve participants as co-creators of knowledge, actively influencing research questions, procedures, and interpretations, as opposed to treating them as objects of study. Due to their emphasis on voice, experience, and shared reflection, methods like participatory action research, narrative inquiry, storytelling, dialogic interviews, focus groups, and collaborative interpretation are especially well suited to this paradigm. These approaches ensure that knowledge production stays rooted in lived

realities and responsive to communal needs by fostering trust, reciprocity, and contextual understanding through ongoing engagement and immersion within communities (Choane, 2025; Randle, 2024).

## 5. Operationalising Ubuntu in Research Practice

Ubuntu operationalisation entails deliberate, relational, and participatory procedures that promote group participation and shared accountability. These include using dialogic data collection techniques, co-developing research questions with participants, and cultivating courteous relationships with gatekeepers, elders, and established community structures. Involving participants as co-researchers, conducting collaborative analysis through community dialogues, validating findings through member-checking and communal review, disseminating knowledge to communities in accessible formats, and upholding long-term relational accountability beyond the study's duration are all ways to further realise Ubuntu. This strategy guarantees ethically sound, culturally sensitive, and respectful research that benefits participants and builds community trust (Makhanya, 2025; Padayachee et al., 2023).

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## 6. Benefits and Contributions of Ubuntu Research

Participants recognise that Ubuntu faces challenges like institutional barriers, the potential for romanticising Indigenous knowledge, diversity within Global South communities, and the arduous process of building relationships. Ubuntu principles may be at odds with Western academic standards, and Indigenous frameworks may not be familiar to journals. Nevertheless, these limitations highlight the need for complementary frameworks rather than Ubuntu's shortcomings. Ubuntu-based research offers contextually relevant knowledge, improves epistemic justice, and restores African intellectual agency. It enhances relationships between researchers and participants, promotes community empowerment, and fortifies ethical integrity. Ubuntu encourages methodological innovation based on oral traditions and communal practices while bringing research into line with African sociocultural realities (Bhuda & Marumo, 2022; Ngubane & Makua, 2021).

### 6.1 Benefits and Contributions

By emphasising relationality, collective responsibility, and human dignity in the creation of knowledge, an Ubuntu-based paradigm significantly advances empirical research. By appreciating collective meaning-making and indigenous epistemologies, it challenges prevailing individualistic and Eurocentric research traditions. By doing this, Ubuntu improves contextual relevance,

ethical sensitivity, and the transformative potential of research, especially in African and Global South contexts (Kamanzi et al., 2025):

- Epistemic inclusivity: By validating Indigenous knowledge systems, collective wisdom, and relational ways of knowing, it opposes Eurocentric individualism.
- Ethical depth: Ubuntu integrates compassion, empathy, and social responsibility throughout the research process, going beyond institutional protocols.
- Contextual relevance: It yields results that are directly applicable to African and Global South contexts, socially grounded, and culturally sensitive.
- Potential for transformation: Ubuntu-oriented research frequently seeks to advance community development, social cohesion, and empowerment in addition to understanding reality.

### 6.2 Limitations and Challenges

Notwithstanding its advantages, the Ubuntu paradigm has some significant drawbacks that should be carefully considered. The philosophical richness of methodological clarity frequently falls short, making operationalisation in empirical studies difficult. Additionally, generalisability may be limited by the contextual and relational nature of Ubuntu-informed research and interacting with positivist academic institutions may cause conflicts. Additionally, there is a chance that Ubuntu will be romanticised and that internal power dynamics within communities will be hidden in the absence of critical reflexivity (Kamanzi et al., 2025; Mathebula & Martinez-Vargas, 2023):

- Operational ambiguity: Ubuntu requires careful translation into research practices because it is philosophically rich but can be methodologically vague.
- Generalisation constraints: Findings from relational and context-specific methods may not be as externally valid.
- Institutional misalignment: Ubuntu-based research may not meet positivist standards in the major academic funding and publishing systems.
- Risk of romanticisation: Ubuntu could be idealised without critical reflexivity, ignoring power imbalances, conflict, and social exclusion.

Given the circumstances, Ubuntu provides a solid, morally sound, and contextually sensitive research paradigm. It requires careful navigation of its philosophical and institutional challenges, but when operationalised with methodological clarity and critical reflexivity, it improves empirical inquiry by aligning knowledge production with human dignity, social justice, and communal responsibility (Mosala, 2025).

## 7. Globalisation of Ubuntu as a Philosophy

Under the astute and visionary leadership of His Excellency, Honourable Cyril Ramaphosa, President of South Africa, the G20 leadership unintentionally adopted Ubuntu as a guiding principle. The 20 most powerful countries gather at the G20, which is recognised as a premier multilateral forum, to outline a future course for the global agenda and common issues. Only the G20 and the most powerful international organisations are usually invited to attend these summits and contribute to the G20 agenda, which shapes the political and economic landscape of the world. The G20 summit welcomed participation and contributions from a variety of

sectors, including non-governmental organisations, public and private entities, and politically neutral partners, during South Africa's 2025 chairmanship. Over 30 additional countries were invited (South African Government News Agency, 2025; Kwame, 2025). This expansion only relates to the inclusive ideology of South Africa, which maintains that no one should be excluded and that every voice matters, regardless of social, economic, or political status. A fundamental tenet of Ubuntu is this way of thinking.
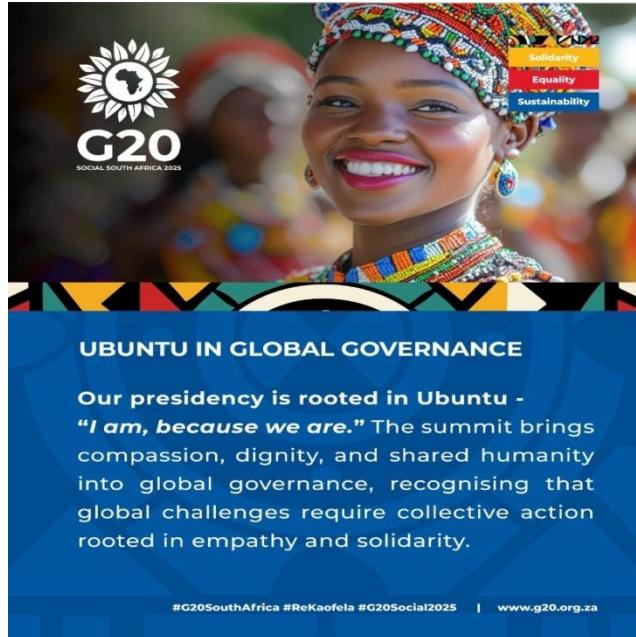


*Figure 2: Ubuntu in Global Governance*

*Source: G20 South Africa Portal, www.g20.org.za*

Figure 2 depicts one of the posters developed for the 2025 G20 summit held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 22–23 November 2025. The inaugural G20 summit on the African continent was hosted by South Africa, which used this opportunity to solicit cordial invitations and contributions from nations and institutions with limited or negligible influence in global economic and political discussions. South Africa, rooted in the Ubuntu philosophy, perceived this gathering as an opportunity for less fortunate and disadvantaged nations to engage in the global social, political, and economic discourse. Participants in this research passionately believed that South Africa redefined Ubuntu; rather than seeking individual acclaim for hosting the inaugural G20 summit, it attributed the summit's success to the entire continent of Africa. South Africa introduced Ubuntu on the global governance agenda and reinforced a message (Reputation Poll, 2025; Dlakavu, 2024).



*Figure 3: South African flag and colours at the G20 Summit*

*Source: G20 South Africa Portal, www.g20.org.za*

South Africa recognised the essential ideals of inclusivity by endorsing the theme, "I am because we are." This ensures that the summit genuinely considers the challenges and needs of the Global South, advances its interests by promoting programmes that prioritise empathy and solidarity, and acknowledges that global challenges require collective action to address social issues, including eradicating hunger, creating employment within national borders, and resolving inequalities perpetuated by global economic powers (Khohliso et al., 2025).

Participants determined that, in addition to being a paradigm, Ubuntu serves as a robust theory of governance and leadership. Beyond research, the analysis demonstrates that Ubuntu has direct relevance for global leadership and governance, particularly in addressing structural injustice in international systems. South Africa's leadership within the G20 provides a contemporary illustration of Ubuntu's governance potential. As a representative of the Global South, South Africa has consistently embraced themes of solidarity, inclusivity, developmental justice, and multilateral cooperation, advocating for a global order that recognises unequal historical responsibilities and differentiated capacities. Ubuntu's insistence on exercising power with collective responsibility, particularly towards the most vulnerable, resonates with this approach (Khohliso et al., 2025; Sipondo, 2025; Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024)

The global response to the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines shows that Ubuntu is not present in the current global governance systems. Despite rhetorical commitments to solidarity, vaccine access was overwhelmingly concentrated in wealthy Western states, whereas African countries were marginalised due to vaccine nationalism, intellectual property barriers, and delayed access. An Ubuntu perspective exposes a profound ethical failure: a governance system prioritising national self-interest over shared humanity. Had Ubuntu informed global decision-making, vaccine production, distribution, and intellectual property regimes would have been guided by principles of relational responsibility, distributive justice, and the protection of life as a collective global benefit (Dotsey et al., 2025; Jecker et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022).

### 1. Ubuntu as a Framework for Social and Political Justice

Ubuntu offers a normative framework for social justice within the African political context that is based on relational accountability, human dignity, and group well-being. Ubuntu presents social justice as a moral duty to restore harmony, correct historical injustice, and guarantee inclusion within the social and political community rather than only considering justice through legalistic or institutional lenses. This viewpoint is especially important in post-colonial African states, where social cohesion, equity, and reconciliation must be prioritised alongside rights and redistribution due to the legacy of dispossession, inequality, and exclusion (Udah et al., 2025; Geduld, 2020).

Nelson Mandela's leadership philosophy provides a compelling example of Ubuntu as a social justice political ethic. Through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Mandela's strategy during South Africa's democratic transition mirrored Ubuntu's focus on restorative rather than retributive justice. Mandela showed how Ubuntu-informed political leadership can address systemic injustice while averting cycles of violence and social disintegration by emphasising communication, forgiveness, and group healing (Cerminara, 2025; Diop, 2017).

More generally, by promoting participatory democracy, moral leadership, and people-centered policymaking, Ubuntu's political framework opposes adversarial and exclusive models of governance. It places social justice as a shared societal duty based on solidarity and mutual recognition rather than just as the result of state action. In this way, Ubuntu provides Africa with a unique but globally applicable contribution to political philosophy—one that reconciles justice with the lived realities of communities, rehumanises power, and addresses ethics in governance (Patel et al., 2024; Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018).

### 2. Global Climate Governance and Environmental Justice: A Just Transition Perspective

From the perspective of environmental justice, climate change represents not only an ecological disaster but also a major ethical and political conundrum resulting from past injustice. Despite making extraordinarily little contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions, African nations suffer disproportionately from the effects of climate change, including food insecurity, droughts, floods, and loss of livelihood. This disparity emphasises the need for industrialised, high-emitting nations to spearhead climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives in accordance with the Paris Agreement, especially through capacity building, technology transfer, emissions reduction, and climate finance. Therefore, rather than emphasising voluntary environmental stewardship, environmental justice reframes climate action as a matter of justice, accountability, and global solidarity (Gueldich, 2025).

Through three interconnected principles, South Africa's Just Transition Framework offers a useful justice-oriented lens for understanding these global responsibilities. Because wealthier economies have more financial and technological capacity to drive decarbonisation and support vulnerable countries, distributive justice requires that the costs and benefits of a low-carbon transition be distributed equally. Affected communities, particularly workers, Indigenous groups, and marginalised populations, must have a significant voice in national and international climate policies. Procedural justice emphasises inclusive decision-making. Redress for past environmental harm, including compensation for losses and damages incurred by nations and communities least accountable for climate change, is a requirement of restorative justice (Mwale & Ntsobi, 2025; von Lüpke, 2025).

When taken as a whole, these ideas present environmental justice as an international moral duty rather than a matter of national policy. Strong economies must actively support just transitions in the Global South—support that protects livelihoods, promotes sustainable development, and stops new forms of climate inequality—in addition to adhering to the Paris Agreement's emissions targets. In this sense, environmental justice, like Ubuntu, reaffirms our shared humanity in the face of global catastrophe by demanding that climate solutions be morally and socially sound in addition to being technically sound (Martin et al., 2020).

### 3. Ubuntu constitutes a coherent and defensible research

This study argues that Ubuntu is not just a cultural ethic or moral philosophy, but rather a logical and defendable research paradigm situated within Southern epistemologies. Ubuntu is a paradigm that offers a unique ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspective that reframes the creation, validation, and application of knowledge. Ubuntu positions people, organisations, and states as mutually constituted through interdependence, affirming

relational being—umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu—ontologically. According to epistemology, knowledge is not detached individual cognition but rather socially produced, dialogical, and rooted in lived communal experience. Ubuntu emphasises ethical responsibility, dignity, care, and reciprocity as essential components of leadership, governance, and inquiry from an axiological perspective (Maluleke, 2024).

Ubuntu aligns methodologically with relational, dialogic, and participatory research approaches that prioritise community accountability, co-creation, and group meaning-making. This makes it possible to operationalise the paradigm in empirical research through mutual knowledge sharing, cooperative analysis, and community engagement. By challenging the dominance of Eurocentric, extractive research traditions and legitimising Indigenous knowledge systems, Ubuntu directly advances epistemic justice. However, the study also critically acknowledges its limitations, such as difficulties in standardising methodology, conflicts with positivist academic standards, and the danger of romanticising communal harmony while ignoring internal power imbalances. However, these drawbacks do not lessen the paradigmatic value of Ubuntu; rather, they imply that its application must be reflexive and context-sensitive (Randle, 2024; Marovah & Mutanga, 2023).

When combined, these analyses present Ubuntu as a normative framework that has the potential to transform global leadership and governance, as well as a research paradigm for contemporary Southern epistemologies. Ubuntu provides the world community with a humanitarian alternative to exclusive, competitive models of power—one that links leadership, policymaking, and the creation of evidence with interdependence, justice, and dignity. Ubuntu stands out as Africa's intellectual contribution and a globally applicable framework for moral governance and shared futures in a world marked by pandemics, climate emergencies, and geopolitical inequalities (Randle, 2024; Laloo, 2022).



*Figure 4: A Depiction of Diversity in Cultural Engagement*

*Source : https://teenentrepreneur.co.za/*

Figure 4 illustrates that the contemplation of cultural norms is not confined to a specific ethnic group; individuals from all races and backgrounds can engage in this reflection. Using the concept of Ubuntu, it emphasises that, collectively, diverse perspectives can unite to foster the development of a more robust and cohesive nation.

One participant strongly felt that "*Africans have consistently shared their Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural norms, and traditional practices with the global community; however, due to*

*the lack of documentation in the past, Western scholars have often sought to interpret these from a European perspective. Consequently, this has led to the formulation of solutions that are unsuitable for Africa and the Global South because they are based on distorted and reengineered facts.*

This study further makes a robust argument that Ubuntu is not a mere cultural ethic or moral philosophy, but rather a logical and defendable research paradigm located within Southern epistemologies. Ubuntu is a paradigm that offers a unique ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspective that reframes the creation, validation, and application of knowledge. Ubuntu positions people, organisations, and states as mutually constituted through interdependence, affirming relational being—umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu—ontologically. According to epistemology, knowledge is not detached individual cognition but rather socially produced, dialogical, and rooted in lived communal experience. Ubuntu emphasises ethical responsibility, dignity, care, and reciprocity as essential components of leadership, governance, and inquiry from an axiological perspective (Maluleke, 2024; Costa & Ntsobi, 2023).

Beyond research, the analysis shows that Ubuntu relates to global governance and leadership, especially when it comes to tackling structural injustice in international systems. Ubuntu's governance potential is demonstrated in a modern way by South Africa's leadership in the G20. South Africa has continuously embraced themes of solidarity, inclusivity, developmental justice, and multilateral cooperation as a representative of the Global South, promoting a global order that acknowledges unequal historical responsibilities and differentiated capacities. This strategy is in line with Ubuntu's insistence on using power with shared responsibility, especially for the most vulnerable (Mokganya & Molepo, 2025; Ngcetane-Vika & Pule; 2025; Tshifura, 2025)

## 8. Conclusion

The analyses and reflections advanced by this study establish Ubuntu as both a research paradigm for reorienting Southern epistemologies and a normative framework with the potential to transform global leadership and governance. Ubuntu presents the global community with a humanitarian alternative to competitive and exclusionary power structures, integrating evidence generation, policy formulation, and leadership with principles of dignity, justice, and interdependence. In a world marked by pandemics, climate crises, and geopolitical inequalities, Ubuntu emerges as Africa's intellectual legacy and a universally relevant paradigm for ethical governance and shared destinies (Grobler & Powell, 2025; Radebe, 2025; Zhakata & Wuta, 2025).

Ubuntu provides a robust, decolonial research framework that repositions Southern epistemologies within African knowledge production. Ubuntu's relational ontology, communal epistemology, ethical axiology, and participatory methodology contest Eurocentric research paradigms and re-establish African intellectual agency. To put Ubuntu into action, you need to collaborate with people, be aware of their cultures, and work with communities over and over again. This leads to scholarship that is based on ethics and is relevant to the situation. Even though it is hard for institutions to adopt Ubuntu, it has the power to change the way research is done around the world by making it more open, humane, and diverse. It is an essential contribution from Africa to the overarching endeavour of decolonising and pluralising knowledge systems (Marovah & Mutanga, 2023; Seehawer, 2018).

This study demonstrates that Ubuntu is a profound and cohesive research framework rooted in Southern epistemologies and African relational paradigms. Ubuntu posits that human existence is intrinsically interwoven, challenging the dominant Eurocentric framework that prioritises independence, objectivity, and analytical detachment. It advocates for a relational ontology, a communal epistemology, an ethic of caring, and a participatory methodology that together establish a transformative framework for knowledge creation. To use Ubuntu in research, one must deliberately engage with the community, adhere to respectful entry protocols, employ dialogical methodologies, collaborate in data analysis, and maintain consistent mutual accountability (Radebe, 2025; Ntsobi, 2024; Maluleke, 2024)

These practices improve ethical integrity and support epistemic justice by treating communities as active participants in creating meaning instead of just objects of study. Therefore, Ubuntu helps to decolonise research, give African intellectuals back their power, and make scholarly work more relevant to the context. There are still problems to solve, especially when it comes to getting institutions to accept Ubuntu and putting it into practice, but it is a powerful idea that could change the way research is done in many fields. Its focus on shared humanity, collective well-being, and reciprocal knowledge exchange provides an influential framework for creating a more inclusive, pluralistic, and socially responsive global research environment (Makhetha, 2024; Marovah & Mutanga, 2023).

## 9. Recommendations

Building on the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations propose concrete pathways for institutionalising Ubuntu as a research paradigm and as a guiding framework for leadership, governance, and knowledge production, both within Africa and globally. The study presents proposals to advocate for Ubuntu as a research paradigm that enhances Southern knowledge and serves as a mechanism for global governance and multilateralism:

### a). Integrating Ubuntu into research curricula

Integrating Ubuntu into research curricula is essential for cultivating epistemic plurality in higher education. Universities and research institutions in the Global South should formally embed Ubuntu and other non-Eurocentric frames within their research methodology, philosophy of science, ethics, and leadership modules, particularly at the postgraduate level. This integration should move beyond symbolic inclusion and instead critically engage students with Ubuntu's ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations, enabling emerging scholars to apply relational, participatory, and context-sensitive approaches in empirical research (Fataar, 2025; Mpofu & Sefotho, 2024).

### b). Developing Ubuntu-based ethical guidelines

Developing ethical guidelines based on Ubuntu is critical to strengthen research ethics by complementing existing institutional review frameworks with relationship- and community-centered principles. Such guidelines should foreground dignity, reciprocity, collective benefits, and long-term accountability, particularly in research involving marginalised communities. Ubuntu-informed ethics would reframe consent as an ongoing relational process and emphasise responsibility to communities beyond data extraction, thereby addressing ethical gaps exposed in conventional, individualistic research ethics models (Sambala et al., 2019).

### c). Strengthening Indigenous Knowledge Networks

Enhancing Indigenous knowledge networks is essential for addressing epistemic marginalisation within global knowledge systems. African scholars and institutions ought to invest in collaborative platforms, journals, conferences, and mentorship programmes that prioritise and safeguard local epistemologies and South–South intellectual interaction. These networks can enhance African voices, promote comparative learning, and develop collective power to impact global research agendas. These networks will enable scholars from the Global South to document indigenous knowledge systems and practices that underpin their societies; neglecting this urgency may result in the erosion of knowledge systems that our ancestors practiced and depended upon prior to the emergence of technology and Western paradigms (Filho et al., 2025; Ajani et al., 2024).

### d). Structural Institutional Support for Southern epistemologies

Ensuring institutional support for Southern epistemologies requires deliberate policy and structural reforms within universities, funding agencies, and publishing systems. This includes recognising Ubuntu-based scholarship through promotion and tenure criteria, allocating dedicated funding streams for indigenous research, and challenging peer-review norms that privilege positivist or Eurocentric paradigms. Institutional legitimacy is crucial for Ubuntu's move from the margins to the centre of academic discourse (Ntsobi, 2024).

### e). Multidisciplinary research based on African perspectives

Organisations such as the University of South Africa's (UNISA) Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute ought to influence African perspectives on indigenous philosophical ideas that have been effective for many years. Ubuntu's significance extends beyond the social sciences into governance, environmental studies, public health, economics, and technology by promoting interdisciplinary research grounded in African philosophies. Through integrated, human-centred approaches, multidisciplinary enables Ubuntu to tackle complex global issues like inequality, pandemics, and climate change. Ubuntu thus becomes both an African philosophical contribution and a universally applicable framework for inclusive knowledge production, just governance, and moral leadership (Radebe, 2025; Mbeki, 2024; Kamga, 2018; Gumede, 2016).

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