

Research Article

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# OCAP and Ubuntu: An Educational Framework for Ethical Consciousness in Community-Based Participatory Research

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## Abstract

**Background/purpose.** Unethical research conduct, particularly resource harvesting and neglecting knowledge holders, persists despite global regulations. Whether deliberate or unintentional, this outcome precipitates data exploitation, erosion of trust, and non-compliance among the individuals involved. The current study emphasizes the consciousness of stakeholders to mitigate exploitative vulnerabilities.

**Materials/methods.** An exploratory qualitative research design was employed for this study. Five stakeholders were strategically involved in conceptualizing the OCAP framework and the Ubuntu philosophical foundation, presenting the concepts as a strategic framework to facilitate ethical community-based participatory research practices. The qualitative data collected through one-on-one interviews, guided by semi-structured questionnaires, were analyzed using a content analysis approach.

**Results.** The OCAP concept represents a significant advancement in the ethical conduct of research involving grassroots communities, emphasizing ownership, control, access, and possession of any outcomes. This perspective aligns seamlessly with the core principles of Ubuntu, centered on interconnectedness, shared responsibility, respect, and mutual upliftment, as opposed to individualism.

**Conclusion.** OCAP and Ubuntu provide a blueprint for ethical participatory research, including conduct, policy, and regulations. While researchers must adhere, it is equally essential to ensure that grassroots community members understand their rights, as such development promises resilience against potential exploitation.



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## 1. Introduction

Within the African research landscape, a notable challenge persists – a pervasive skepticism and epistemological mistrust toward traditional Western-oriented scientific approaches of knowledge production (Mkabela, 2005; Ogone, 2017; Ryan et al., 2024). Most traditional African communities often view conventional research methodologies, particularly Euro-Western paradigms, as extractive, primarily benefiting external stakeholders while offering little to no tangible benefits to the communities. This constitutes a deeply concerning problem that should be proactively addressed by governmental bodies, higher learning institutions and local authorities to mitigate potential adverse consequences. Extractive research or unethical knowledge harvesting, as it is sometimes called, refers to a one-sided supply-end research practice characterized by the unidirectional gathering of data from individuals, communities, or context by external stakeholders, without meaningful engagement or reciprocal benefit to the studied cohorts (Smajgl & Ward, 2015; Tynan, 2023). This practice frequently results in an enduring reluctance among local African inhabitants to engage in research, even when their local institutions of higher learning undertake it and might impact their livelihoods.

The assumption that most African-located research projects often fail to yield commensurate benefits for local populations is evident in empirical literature (Andrews & Okpanachi, 2012; Bain *et al.*, 2022; Chigevenga, 2022), highlighting a persistent disconnect between scientific initiatives and equitable socio-economic advancement. The critique points to a broader ethical issue: conventional research methodologies, in many contexts, inadequately appropriate local and grassroots knowledge without ensuring that the results serve the people. This narrative possesses the capacity to exacerbate mistrust between researchers and the researched. Grassroots knowledge in this context refers to the original information, practical insights, experiential nuances, and contextual understanding of individuals in local communities, rooted in their daily experiences and cultural endeavors. The knowledge may not be formally profiled or recognized within mainstream scientific frameworks.

The epistemic injustice outlined in this paper is prevalent in rural areas and settlements characterized by marginalization, limited access to resources, lack of decision-making power, cultural heterogeneity, and a history of colonialism, which collectively undermine their agency, perpetuate cycles of vulnerability and disempowerment (Appiah, 2020; Hlalele & Mabasa, 2025). A fundamental ethical research practice, void of knowledge-extraction, sees the participating communities as partners and deliberately prioritizes the individuals' agency. In elucidating this issue, the OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) framework and Ubuntu philosophy, which are critical tools for engaged scholarship and ethical community-based participatory action research, emerge as indispensable methodological instruments for in-depth analysis.

Engaged scholarship is a pedagogical approach and research paradigm that stresses scholars' active and reciprocal involvement with societal stakeholders (Horan & Omeife, 2020; Levac *et al.*, 2022). This research methodology transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries by integrating contextual knowledge, fostering social relevance, and promoting transformative impact, bridging the gap between scientific inquiry and practical application (Bain *et al.*, 2022). Parallel to the latter, ethical community-based participatory action research methodology promises a collaborative partnership that enables researchers and participants/communities to co-create impactful knowledge and share ownership of research wealth accordingly (Turin *et al.*, 2023). In an ideal environment, these research strategies facilitate the efficient involvement of community members, positioning them as equal partners in the problem identification process, data collection engagements, their analysis, and the development of interventions (Maiter *et al.*, 2008; Peterson, 2009; Gelmon *et al.*, 2013; Cornish *et al.*, 2023). Based on this scientific evidence, it is warranted to assert that the strategies, if strategically

applied, will ensure research aligns with values and needs, substantially empower marginalized populations, and enhance social change in African communities and beyond.

### **1.1. The OCAP Framework**

OCAP is a framework, traditionally developed by Canada's First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC), to foster ethical data governance. This protocol aims to restore and respect Indigenous peoples' and communities' rights and sovereignty (FNIGC, 2014). This initiative was conceived in response to the historical context wherein Indigenous data was frequently misappropriated and used without owners' consent, leading to mistrust and harmful outcomes. The OCAP's principles are ingrained in self-determination, asserting that First Nations have the right to own, control, access, and possess their information (Bruhn, 2014; Paul, 2023). This contributes to the broader movements and guidelines towards Indigenous data sovereignty — that knowledge holders reserve the authority to govern their information, protect their heritage, and ensure equitable benefit distribution.

"Ownership," according to FNIGC, represents the first principle of OCAP, signifying data governance by the Indigenous peoples' communities. This principle affirms that the community from which research information was generated collectively owns data, just as individuals possess personal information. This reinforces complete autonomy over data governance by the community. "Control" is the second principle. It emphasizes the rights of Indigenous peoples to collectively manage and oversee all facets of research initiatives undertaken in their territories, including planning, execution, evaluation of research processes, dissemination of outcomes, and subsequent actions directed toward these communities. This implies that researchers involved with Indigenous peoples' studies operate within the boundaries and frameworks established and mutually agreed upon by the communities, ensuring respect, accountability, and transparency. "Access," the third principle, deals with usability. It emphasizes that Indigenous people can retrieve and utilize data compiled from research conducted in their communities to inform decisions concerning their well-being. Similarly, "possession," the fourth principle in the framework, defines Indigenous peoples' roles as custodians of data regarding their communities.

In contrast, ownership establishes the conceptual relationship between people and their resources, whereas possession—or stewardship—denotes the tangible control of information. Like the "ownership" principle, the "possession" principle mandates that data cannot be released or disposed of without explicit consent from Indigenous people, the knowledge holders. In essence, possession is the mechanism through which ownership is asserted and protected. Collectively, these four principles mandate that conducting community-based research respects community values for entry and engagement, reinforcing the ethical imperative of respecting Indigenous governance structures in research practices.

### **1.2. Ubuntu philosophy**

Ubuntu—a social ethic and African worldview of life rooted in the Bantu languages of Southern Africa—embodies a philosophical position that illustrates the interconnectedness of humanity. Its conceptualization is effectively conveyed by the phrase "*I am because we are*", reflecting the deep African cultural belief in communalism, solidarity, dignity, interdependence, and the collective good. Its philosophical foundations foster a narrative that individual well-being is intrinsically linked to the existence of others, making it an effective tool for promoting social harmony, reconciliation, and restorative justice (Mupedziswa, Rankopo & Mwansa, 2019). This Ubuntu concept can be traced back to traditional African societies where communal living and shared responsibilities were essential for survival, well-being, communities' security and sustainability (Mangaliso, 2001), the evolution of the Ubuntu concept has been influential in shaping governance, and most recently, in post-apartheid

South Africa, where it was invoked by figures like, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, and Thabo Mbeki to promote national healing and democracy.

The Ubuntu philosophy provides a pivotal framework for mitigating unethical knowledge harvesting, promoting reciprocity, shared ownership of knowledge, and ethical engagement with communities. Emphasizing relationality and the inherent dignity of all participants, Ubuntu encourages researchers to establish genuine partnerships that recognize and valorize local knowledge (Seehawer, 2018; Marovah & Mutanga, 2024), ensuring that research processes remain participatory, transparent, and mutually beneficial. This approach challenges extractive research paradigms by fostering a sense of collective responsibility (Marovah & Mutanga, 2024), emphasizing capacity building, and transforming communities into active co-creators rather than passive subjects, thereby cultivating trust, supporting sustainable development, and safeguarding cultural integrity within research initiatives.

The phrase “I am because we are”, in the context of this study, reflects the communal ownership of resources, much like OCAP's principle on community control over their data and knowledge for their collective benefit. This mutual emphasis on collective welfare and self-determination makes the concepts most appropriate for explaining ethical consciousness in participatory research, further challenging conventional methodologies frequently used to disregard knowledge holders and grassroots communities.

The OCAP framework emphasizes Indigenous peoples' autonomy, shielding external forces from misappropriating or misusing Indigenous communities' information (FNIGC, 2014). In parallel, Ubuntu advocates engagements and decisions that benefit the collective, resisting the dominance of external forces, individualism, and foreign interests (Ujomu, 2023). In addition, OCAP's data access and possession principles emphasize the community's right to manage its knowledge wealth, ensuring respect, adequate and appropriate use. Equally, Ubuntu stresses human dignity and compassion in governance and social interaction, where decisions should reflect respect and care for a community. Ethical accountability in both concepts reflects a moral stance grounded in respect, dignity, and collectiveness. Based on the preceding synthesis, these concepts exhibit high interdependence and share overlapping theoretical and structural traits, suggesting a convergent functional relationship in challenging exploitive research methodologies.

## 2. Statement of the research problem

The Belmont Report of 1979, the Helsinki Declaration of 1964, updated in 2013, and UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005), safeguard research participants from exploitation. These guidelines emphasized informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and ownership in research, ensuring that individuals participate willingly, without coercion or undue risk, and gain from the outcomes. Nevertheless, there has been prevalent exploitation, including deliberate unethical knowledge harvesting, denial of data access, and exclusion from the research benefits derived from their contributions (Olufadewa, Adesina & Ayorinde, 2020):

*“...perturbing issue is the practice of 'helicopter science' or 'parachute study' where foreign researchers harvest samples or data from Africa and analyze in their countries with little input from or credit given to local African researchers and communities who aid the work, which is still ongoing. Some African researchers do not even contribute to the design or activities of international health researchers' projects in their 'backyards'. If African governments, research institutions, health care organizations, funding partners, and friends of Africa keep following the 'business-as-usual' approach, we are following a blueprint for disaster.”*

The above shortfalls illustrate the persistent necessity to enhance ethical practices and fully uphold participants' rights.

### 3. Rationale and Significance

This study aims to interrogate interventions towards alienating unethical knowledge harvesting and extractive research practices - a Western epistemological practice prevalent in Africa. Strategizing the transition away from extractive research paradigms holds profound significance in advancing mutually beneficial research initiatives on the continent and fostering epistemic justice for the exploited grassroots communities.

The conceptualization of OCAP and Ubuntu as instrumental resources for ethical research practice is substantiated by the fact that both frameworks fundamentally emphasize principles of collective control, responsibility, and the inherent dignity of community members - making them powerful tenets for promoting equity and justice in contemporary research. These instruments' principles share deep-rooted values woven in harmony, community, respect, and collective accountability, even though they are usually applied from different perspectives.

### 4. Methodology

An exploratory qualitative case study research methodology was employed, utilizing both purposive and snowball sampling techniques to engage academics involved in research on Indigenous peoples in Canada and South Africa. Purposive sampling is a non-probability method that deliberately selects participants based on specific attributes relevant to the research aim (Rahman, 2023). Snowball sampling, on the other hand, leverages existing participants to recruit additional qualified subjects through referrals, thus facilitating access to hard-to-reach or unidentified populations (Rahman, 2023). Since OCAP and Ubuntu originate from Canada and South Africa, respectively, they were deliberately chosen for the study. Furthermore, both countries show documented knowledge exploitation and marginalization patterns, making them ideal sites for scholarly investigation.

The purposive sampling further enabled the selection of two academics from both countries with extensive knowledge of OCAP and Ubuntu. This facilitated the recruitment of an additional three participants through snowball sampling. Five academics were recruited, three of whom were based in South Africa. The stakeholders contributing valuable insights to the study were selected based on two primary criteria: firstly, holding the status of a professor affiliated with a recognized public university; and secondly, being an established scholar, whose research interests intersect with fields such as conventional methodology, western epistemology, African studies, and Indigenous Canada. The sample size was determined through the principle of saturation, meaning data collection continued until subsequent interviews added little new information. The interviews, lasting approximately 30 minutes each, were conducted between February and August 2023 via one-on-one sessions guided by semi-structured questionnaires.

Data was analyzed using a content analytical framework following an open coding system. This involved organizing participants' extracts to identify patterns related to ethical consciousness in community-based participatory research. Coding qualitative data for content analysis involved first familiarizing oneself with the transcripts through repeated reading to immerse oneself in the content; highlighting relevant segments and assigning preliminary labels to reflect their meaning; and reviewing labels to identify and categorize commonalities. This coding framework was consistently applied throughout the dataset, ensuring all relevant segments were labelled and grouped into meaningful categories. Essentially, the content analysis coding involved breaking down the data into manageable segments, assigning labels, and grouping these into categories to reveal patterns across the data.

Throughout this process, strict confidentiality measures were observed to protect participants' identities and privacy. Identifiable information, such as names, positions, and addresses, was deliberately omitted from the analysis. This ensured that participants who shared valuable insights could do so without fear of being identified. The resulting coding patterns were systematically employed in the study, with abbreviations such as CA=Canada, F=Female, M=Male, SA=South Africa, P=Participant, and Yrs=Years.

## 5. Results

The results are presented in alignment with the OCAP's principles of ownership, control, access, and possession, and are discussed accordingly.

### 5.1. Ownership principle

In Ubuntu, resources, knowledge, and relationships are inherently communal and must contribute ultimately to the common societal good. This aligns with OCAP's stance on utilizing community-owned data to promote their well-being, address disparities, and enhance equity. The intersection of these two concepts stresses the importance of community ownership as a strategic approach to addressing power imbalances, preserving cultural knowledge, and promoting research practices that align with the community's values and priorities. Stakeholders were instrumental in distilling the discourse and mapping out indicators for policy reform and practice:

*"The starting point is accountability and transparency; a concern that must be emphasized in our research institutions. Rather than relying on samples or participants, the primary knowledge-holders, grassroots community members, should be classified as key stakeholders and research project collaborators. This acknowledgement will bridge the gaps in extractive research and knowledge exploitation, which is evident in Western research approaches. In addition, it is crucial to provide communities with the tools and skills training necessary to manage research data independently. This form of empowerment not only respects the principle of ownership and accountability but also builds capacity within the community to utilize their research information for their purposes, ensuring that research outcome benefits are realized locally" (P3; 48yrs; F; Academic; SA).*

*"Ownership in this context is not simply limited to possession but about stewardship and ensuring that resources are used appropriately and resourcefully to sustain and uplift the community. In ensuring ownership in line with the OCAP principles, it is pertinent for researchers to recognize that the information generated from communities belongs to the people of those communities. In other words, researchers must obtain explicit consent from the community members before collecting data, ensuring that the community understands and agrees to the intended use of the data. In practical terms, this could involve establishing agreements during community entry stages of the project that clearly outline data management practices, including how data will be collected, stored, accessed, used and disseminated. The agreements must be co-developed with community representatives, if not all members, to ensure the entire research framework reflects their values and priorities" (P1; 33yrs; M; Academic; CA).*

These stakeholders advanced a narrative that successful participatory research, as it concerns ownership, requires a shift in paradigm from traditional Western-centric epistemology - one that prioritizes individual property rights over communal rights. Accordingly, collaborative research should be emphasized. The latter Collaborative research ensures that the community is actively involved, not as samples/research subjects. As key stakeholders, community members co-create knowledge with researchers at every stage of the project, participating in the study's mapping, framework design, instrumentation, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of outcomes. According to Iwara and Kilonzo (2022), partnering with the communities for whom a research project is intended is a critical step that requires thoughtful consideration. This step acknowledges their invaluable knowledge of the precise circumstances in their society and intervention measures. The

outcome frequently demonstrates a significant alignment between research agenda and grassroots realities (Paul, 2023). This approach not only respects the rights of the grassroots community members but also enhances the relevance and impact of the research by grounding it in the lived experiences and priorities of the communities.

The “ownership” principle, which asserts that Indigenous communities collectively own data and resources related to their society, deeply resonates with the South African Ubuntu view that one’s actions, decisions, and resources should benefit the community. Ubuntu, centered on the idea that “a person is a person through other people,” emphasizes interconnectedness and the collective nature of human existence (Nussbaum, 2003; Ewuoso & Hall, 2019). In the same manner that OCAP challenges the Western individualistic orientation of data ownership by emphasizing communal rights, Ubuntu illustrates that individuals’ well-being is inseparable from the welfare of the community.

### **5.2. Control principle**

The OCAP control principle denotes the right to dictate and direct research engagement, ensuring it is consistent with ethical standards, culturally sensitive, and aligned with their development imperatives. This control principle mirrors Ubuntu’s respect, accountability, and mutual benefit values. In parallel, Ubuntu emphasizes actions and decisions that uphold the dignity of the communities, as well as resist external engagement with potential misalignments with their cultural norms and collective needs. A stakeholder substantiated this argument:

*“...control implies that Indigenous communities reserve the authority to veto and modify research projects that do not serve the community’s interests and/or fail to respect its cultural values...” Similarly, control extends beyond management; it empowers communities to leverage research outcomes for their benefit, fostering self-determination and enhancing the well-being of the people. The control principle begins with researchers involving Indigenous communities from the outset and reaching an agreement regarding data ownership. This collaborative approach requires using flexible methodologies that are adaptable based on community feedback and preferences, ensuring that the research process is culturally sensitive and ethically sound. Co-developing the research agenda in collaboration with community members will ensure that the objectives, questions, and methodologies align with the community’s interests and cultural practices. Researchers can respect the community’s authority to decide on the collection, usage, and dissemination of outcomes and assist community members in utilizing the data to advocate for policy changes and resource allocations that attend to their specific needs, which in turn, contributes positively to development” (P2; 52yrs; F; Academic; CA).*

From the foregoing, control is about authority and ensuring that research actions and decisions reflect the communities’ shared aspirations, fostering empowerment and collective growth. OCAP’s principle of control positions Indigenous communities as bona fide beneficiaries of research outcomes, enabling them to advocate for policy reforms, resource allocations, and development programs geared towards the realization of their societal needs (FNIGC, 2014). This philosophical perspective is akin to Ubuntu’s insistence on collective decision-making and shared authority, where each community member plays a critical role in shaping outcomes that impact the collective.

### **5.3. Access principle**

In the OCAP framework, access advocates the authority of Indigenous peoples to govern and oversee who engages with data obtained from their community. Regulatory measures in this context emphasized utilization of data in an appropriate, resourceful, respectful, and transparent manner.

*“...access within OCAP not only safeguards indigenous resources but also embodies Ubuntu’s call for communal empowerment and ethical leadership, establishing a foundation for collaborative and responsible stewardship of knowledge resources. Given this, researchers must*

*facilitate mechanisms that enable Indigenous communities not only to possess complete ownership of data but also to retrieve and utilize information that concerns their society, whether for cultural preservation, planning, or development initiatives. Exercising control over access to their data, indigenous communities are better positioned to thwart exploitation frequently observed from external research actors, and foster trust and accountability between researchers and indigenous populations" (P1; 33yrs; M; Academic; CA).*

*"A proper data access framework attests to researchers' commitment to respecting the community's autonomy and agency..., fostering a collaborative and mutually beneficial research environment. Before any research engagement, it is imperative to establish a clear agreement, clarify the data storage conditions, define data access parameters, identify the accessor, specify the purposes for which the data will be accessed, and outline the measures in place to protect privacy and confidentiality. It is also in the interest of researchers to obtain explicit consent from Indigenous communities about data accessibility. Consequently, agreements for data access must be revisited regularly and revised accordingly in line with the community's evolving dynamics, ensuring that it remains relevant and applicable" (P4; 47yrs; F; Academic; SA).*

The discourse around data access acknowledges the role of grassroots community members as knowledge holders. They reserve the right to retain information generated from their community. According to Bruhn (2014), this objective can be realized by facilitating synergistic and participatory collaborations between researchers and the researched, fostering an environment conducive to mutual engagement and co-constructive research processes. Through the process, researchers can empower communities by offering the training and resources required to manage and utilize their collected data effectively, challenge the misuse or misinterpretation of information, and reinforce their control over how their information is used. This form of empowerment aligns with Ubuntu's ideology of collective upliftment, where knowledge is shared and leveraged for the benefit of society. Within the Ubuntu framework, access to resources, especially knowledge, should not benefit individual members but promote social well-being and the overall community's well-being (Mangaliso, 2001; Ujomu, 2023). OCAP's insistence on skills development for collective growth remains a cornerstone of Ubuntu's conceptualization of interconnectedness and mutual benefit.

#### **5.4. Possession principle**

The OCAP framework explains the role of Indigenous communities in maintaining direct control over data, thereby protecting the integrity of sensitive information. A stakeholder in South Africa maintains:

*"Possession is integral in maintaining the security and appropriate use of community data, much like how Ubuntu principles emphasize guardianship of communal assets to serve the broader community's good. Retaining possession of data ensures that external forces do not exploit Indigenous communities for personal gain or in a manner that is contrary to their values. This further ensures that the Indigenous communities remain at the center of decision-making, preventing external interference in research matters that directly impact their future..." (P5; 41yrs; F; Academic; SA).*

*"This possession requires prioritizing Indigenous communities having physical custody of data gathered from their communities. Much like other principles in the OCAP framework, a collaborative partnership between researchers and communities is central, focusing on developing data governance frameworks that align with their cultural practices and values. Similarly, there is a need to establish systems and infrastructures that enable members to store, manage, and protect information safely and autonomously. Tools, such as hard drives, secure servers, and data management software, are resources in spearheading the course, preventing unauthorized access, and ensuring that sensitive information is handled by the owners with the highest standards of security and integrity" (P2; 52yrs; F; Academic; CA).*

The OCAP possession concept supports implementing three principles - ownership, control, and access - by granting Indigenous communities the tools and mechanisms to assert and safeguard their sovereignty over data resources. The implication of possession lies in the recognition that conserved information can inform further research and the development of frameworks fundamental to policy shifts, which are necessary for future community development endeavors (Oguamanam, 2019) – an assumption reflecting Ubuntu's philosophical foundations. In Ubuntu, decision-making extends beyond present-day needs to involve careful consideration of the future, ensuring that communities can reap long-term benefits and that knowledge is preserved for future generations (Koen, 2021). This reflects Ubuntu's intergenerational context, where resources, especially knowledge and practices, are passed down, ensuring the continuity of values, heritage, culture, and the entire community's well-being. In both frameworks, possession emphasizes the centrality of collective control and long-term sustainability, making it a vital mechanism that ensures communities dictate the utilization of their resources, rather than succumbing to Western hegemony.

Arguably, OCAP's framework echoes Ubuntu's narrative of shared responsibility and communal custodianship, where resources are perceived as belonging to the collective rather than the individual. This traditional African concept champions the idea that what benefits one should benefit all; therefore, controlling the custody of data must be for the betterment of the entire community. Consequently, raising researchers' awareness of the OCAP and Ubuntu principles is imperative for promoting effective research data governance within community-based participatory research projects, as these principles—ownership, control, access, and possession—are intrinsically embedded in communal values and mutual respect prevalent in many indigenous and local communities.

Conceptualizing Ubuntu from a research perspective can help researchers understand data ownership. Against the standard paradigm where information primarily sourced from local communities is individually owned by researchers or external institutions, the concept projects a narrative that promotes community stewardship. This fosters awareness of community-driven governance where knowledge remains within the custodial domain of community members, ensuring data sovereignty, ethical stewardship, and empowerment in decision-making processes.

Empowering communities to actively participate in shaping research methodologies for data collection that concern them, contributes to ethical research standards, and enhances mutual trust (Schnarch, 2004; Ryan et al., 2024). When researchers embody and adhere to these principles, they provide equitable data access, enabling community members to leverage their information for developmental initiatives and the preservation of cultural heritage (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016). This, in turn, safeguards it against potential exploitation and ensures its relevance for future generations (Paul, 2023). The overall sense of humanity, agency, dignity and equitable partnership demonstrates Ubuntu as fundamental to advancing ethical research practices. Weaved together, the OCAP and Ubuntu provide a better lens of engaged scholarship and community-based participatory action research, void of exploitation frequently observed in conventional epistemic research methodologies.

## 6. Conclusion

Unethical community-based participatory research, particularly knowledge harvesting, inevitably challenges developing economies, especially in Africa, with such practices resonating with conventional methodologies. This extractive research practice undermines grassroots community's agency, cultural values, data sovereignty and the equitable research benefits derived from their knowledge, consequently, inducing trust and compliance issues. Using the OCAP framework, per Ubuntu's philosophical foundations, this study conceptualizes a guide to navigate participatory

research ethically, addressing vulnerabilities related to grassroots community research. OCAP, primarily developed in Canada, advocates for the self-determination of data, knowledge, and information by Indigenous Peoples. In parallel, the foundational principles of Ubuntu, an African philosophy, are centered on the interconnectedness of individuals, shared responsibility, respect, and mutual uplift. The set of ethical guidelines within the OCAP framework protects the rights of indigenous people regarding ethical procedures in conducting research and data management. Ownership, the first principle, asserts that communities collectively own their data, just as individuals own personal information. Secondly, control positions these communities to direct the research process, including decision-making on data collection, management, usage and dissemination. The principle of access guarantees that communities can utilize the data for the collective good. At the same time, possession maintains that communities should physically manage the collected information, safeguarding it from unauthorized use. Emerging from the concepts of partnership, transparency, accountability, and respect for knowledge holders, this framework promotes ethical research that meets the needs and values of the people, aiming to address the often-observed beneficial imbalances in African communities.

## 7. Suggestion

The current findings provide a blueprint for ethical research policy reforms and regulations; they also suggest further areas of study to explore a holistic approach to develop an index that aligns seamlessly with Africa's grassroots realities and is applicable across different contexts. There is a need to raise researchers' awareness of the OCAP and Ubuntu philosophical foundations across various research institutions, as these are essential for fostering ethical awareness within community-based participatory research projects. It is equally important for higher education institutions to ensure wider engagement in grassroots communities, empowering members to understand and resist research activities that exploit their knowledge and undermine their agency.

## 8. Limitations

Due to limited resources, only five stakeholders, specifically professors affiliated with a recognized public university in Canada and South Africa, were enrolled to contribute invaluable insights to the discourse. Similarly, the stakeholders were scholars whose research interests intersect the domains of conventional methodology, Western epistemology, African studies, and Indigenous Canada. In other words, the resultant strategies can be tested on a broader scale, drawing stakeholders from diverse research academic backgrounds and African countries for variation and quality assurance.

## Declarations

**Author Contributions.** I.O.: Literature review, conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, review-editing and writing, original manuscript preparation. The author has read and approved the published on the final version of the article.

**Conflicts of Interest.** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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**Ethical Approval.** Ethical standards, such as property rights acknowledgement, were adhered to.

**Data Availability Statement.** Data is available on request.

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