

ANCESTORCENTRISM AND THE GBEWAAH DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM; A TRANS-LEVEL PARAXIS

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Abstract:

This paper advances Trans-Development as a novel ontological and cosmological framework emerging from Ancestorcentrism and operationalised through the Gbewaa Development Paradigm. In response to the limitations of GDP-centred, technocratic, and sectoral development models, the study introduces the Trans-Level as a meta-integrative space where development is governed by communal ethics (axiology), validated through lived experience and ancestral authority (gnosiology), and enacted through relational governance. Drawing on African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the lived cosmologies of the Mole–Dagbamba peoples of Ghana, Togo, and Burkina Faso, the paper repositions ancestral wisdom as a living epistemic and moral foundation for science, leadership, and development.

The core finding reveals that Trans-Level development moves beyond science, data, and quantitative indicators by capturing lived realities—peace, social harmony, ecological balance, and intergenerational continuity—that conventional development indices cannot adequately measure. Development is thus redefined as a cyclical process that transforms wealth (total potential) into worth (realised communal wellbeing), culminating in Gross Societal Wellbeing (GSW) rather than economic growth alone.

The study concludes that sustainable development cannot be meaningfully achieved through indicators alone. It recommends that development policy and practice adopt holistic wellbeing frameworks, including context-specific Gross National Wellbeing (GNW) metrics grounded in Indigenous cosmologies and communal values, to assess whether development interventions genuinely translate into happiness, peace, and national harmony at community and national levels.

Keywords: Ancestorcentrism; Trans-Development; Gbewaa Development Paradigm; Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Gross Societal Wellbeing; System Transdisciplinarity.

1. Introduction:

Contemporary development and governance challenges, including climate change, ecological degradation, social fragmentation, epistemic injustice, and persistent inequality—are increasingly recognised as wicked and complex problems that resist linear, sectoral, and

technocratic solutions (Morin, 2018; Kelman, 2024). Dominant development paradigms, largely grounded in positivist science and economic growth metrics such as GDP and GNP, continue to privilege quantification, material accumulation, and disciplinary specialization, often at the expense of ethical legitimacy, cultural meaning, and long-term sustainability (Stiglitz et al., 2018; Fioramonti et al., 2022). As a result, these models struggle to account for relational realities, moral accountability, spiritual wellbeing, and intergenerational responsibility—limitations that are particularly evident in Indigenous and non-Western contexts (Mbembe, 2021; Chilisa, 2020).

In response to these limitations, this paper advances Ancestorcentrism and the Gbewaa development paradigm as a system-transdisciplinary philosophical framework rooted in African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and cosmology. Building on, yet extending, earlier formulations of African endogenous development and Ancestorcentrism (Millar, 2006; Millar et al., 2008; Millar, 2014), the paper repositions ancestral wisdom not as symbolic heritage or cultural residue, but as a living epistemic, ethical, and ontological foundation for science, leadership, and development. Within this worldview, ancestors—both living custodians and the departed—function as active agents of moral validation, knowledge continuity, and communal governance, anchoring development within relational, historical, and cosmological orders (Wiredu, 2018; Chilisa et al., 2023; Jambedu et al., 2024).

The paper introduces the Gbewaa(h) Development Paradigm, derived from the Mossi–Dagbamba cosmology of Ghana, Togo, and Burkina Faso, as a practical and philosophical operationalization of Ancestorcentrism. Named after Naa Gbewaa, a foundational ancestral leader whose governance established enduring socio-political and ethical systems, the paradigm conceptualizes development as the harmonization of human, natural, and spiritual domains, rather than material growth alone. This paradigm is articulated through the Cosmic System Constellations of Cosmovision in Ancestorcentrism (CSCCA), which organize culture and art, Indigenous philosophy and metaphysics, and Indigenous science and innovation into an integrated system of being, knowing, and becoming (Jambedu et al., 2024).

Central to the paper’s original contribution is the theorization of the Trans-Level and Trans-Development. The Trans-Level is conceptualized as a meta-integrative ontological and methodological space in which disciplinary boundaries dissolve and ethical (axiological), epistemic (gnosiological), spiritual, and communal dimensions converge (Nicolescu, 2014, 2018; McGregor, 2018; McGregor & Gibbs, 2020). Within this space, development is redefined as a cyclical process that transforms wealth (total potential) into worth (realized wellbeing), culminating in Gross Societal Wellbeing (GSW). Trans-Development thus moves beyond measurement toward meaning, beyond growth toward harmony, and beyond technocracy toward morally and spiritually grounded praxis—aligning with, but extending beyond, wellbeing-oriented frameworks such as GNH and Beyond-GDP approaches (Costanza et al., 2016; Raworth, 2017; Ura et al., 2012; UNECE, 2025).

By extending transdisciplinary scholarship and engaging directly with contemporary debates on transleadership, systems thinking, and post-disciplinary science, this paper positions Ancestorcentrism and the Gbewaa Development Paradigm as globally relevant frameworks for

addressing wicked problems. Drawing on transleadership theory (McGregor & Donnelly, 2014), systems transdisciplinarity (Mokiy, 2019; Mokiy & Lukyanova, 2021, 2022), and inclusive transdisciplinary approaches that recognise multiple cosmologies and “multi-science” epistemologies (Polk, 2015; Manuel-Navarrete, 2025), the paper argues that African Indigenous cosmologies offer not alternative or supplementary knowledge, but advanced civilizational logics capable of reshaping how science, governance, and development are conceived and practiced in an era of planetary uncertainty.

2. Literature Review and the Critical Gap

2.1 Introduction:

This section clarifies the operational definitions of key themes and concepts as they are used in this paper and situates them within the relevant scholarly literature. It critically reviews existing works to establish the theoretical and empirical foundations of the study, while identifying the conceptual gaps that necessitate the development of Ancestorcentrism, the Gbewaa(h) Development Paradigm, and the Trans-Level approach advanced in this paper.

2.2 Operational Definitions

Ancestorcentrism is a system-transdisciplinary philosophical framework grounded in Indigenous epistemologies, deriving conceptually from two foundational terms: Ancestor and Centrism. Ancestor refers not only to the deceased, but also to living persons who function as custodians of cultural memory, moral authority, cosmological knowledge, and communal identity. These individuals—often recognized as heroes and heroines—occupy a foundational role in shaping social order, ethical conduct, and intergenerational continuity (Millar, 2006). Within Indigenous worldviews, ancestors are not passive figures of the past; rather, they constitute an active, relational presence in the moral, spiritual, and practical affairs of the living. Centrism, in turn, denotes a philosophical orientation that places the Ancestor at the epistemic and ontological centre—the primary reference point through which knowledge, meaning, ethics, lived experience, and moral guidance are interpreted and enacted. In this sense, Ancestorcentrism reorients inquiry away from abstract, decontextualized universals toward relational, historically grounded, and communally validated ways of knowing.

Tale 2.1 Operational Definitions of themes and Concepts

Stage	Operational Definition	reference	Author’s position/opinion
Wealth	Total potential of natural, human, spiritual, and technological resources available to a society	Millar (2014); UNEP (2019)	Wealth includes all form of <i>potential</i> , not achievement
Worth	Realized state of holistic development – identity, essence, wellbeing	Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi (2018)	How much of the wealth that has been tarped and use or ethically transformed into meaningful life.
GSW	Gross Societal Wellbeing – the ethical redistribution of value toward holistic communal welfare	Fioramonti et al. (2022)	Prioritising balance, reciprocity, and intergenerational justice rather than GDP accumulation.
Being	Realization of individual and communal identity	Chilisa (2020)	to <i>be</i> is to belong—to lineage, land, community, and cosmos.
Becoming	Continuous moral and intellectual evolution	Freire (2018)	Becoming is the desirable state, reflects lifelong ethical cultivation guided by ancestral wisdom and future responsibility, not linear progress.
Existence	Material security, social equity, ecological sustainability	Sen (2017)	existence must not violate ecological or ancestral obligations.
Essence	Spiritual and moral completeness rooted in ancestral continuity	Mbiti (2015); Wiredu (2018)	<i>who we are beneath material conditions</i> . It anchors ethics, identity, and moral accountability across generations.
Trans-Reality	Ontological and cosmic level of meaning-making and ultimate integration	Nicolescu (2014, 2018); Brenner (2015)	Reality is structured/layered and relational. All form of realities coexists and interact.
Trans-Level	A system thinking Methodological space for transforming potential into practice, wealth into worth through transleadership/governance that integrate ethics and morals (Axiology) of the Ancestors into GSW.	Jambedu (2024)	Practical applications. The Trans-Level is where Ancestorcentrism operates most fully—integrating ethics, governance, time, and cosmology to solve wicked problems.

Authors construction (2025)

2.3 Theoretical Gap

Millar’s foundational contributions—Constellation of Cosmivision (1999), Ancestorcentrism (2006), and Endogenous Development (2008)—provide essential ontological and epistemological grounding for African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and their application

to development practice. These works successfully establish the philosophical basis of Indigenous knowledge and demonstrate its relevance for endogenous development interventions. However, they stop short of theorizing the trans-level as a system-transdisciplinary space for engaging complexity and wicked problems embedded in African cosmologies.

Specifically, existing frameworks do not sufficiently distinguish between general spirituality and the ancestral spirit as a distinct ontological and epistemological category. In African cosmology, the ancestral spirit is not merely metaphysical; it functions as a morally charged force that validates truth, regulates ethics, and ensures transgenerational continuity. Its role in shaping science, philosophy, leadership, and development praxis remains under-theorized, despite its centrality in Indigenous governance and knowledge systems.

This gap necessitates a conceptual advance. In response, this study theorizes the Trans-Level of Ancestorcentrism as a meta-integrative ontological and methodological space where disciplinary boundaries dissolve and ethical (axiological), epistemic (gnosiological), spiritual, and communal dimensions converge. Within this space, development is reconceptualized as a cyclical transformation of wealth (total potential) into worth (realized wellbeing), culminating in Gross Societal Wellbeing (GSW). This orientation shifts development discourse from measurement to meaning, from growth to harmony, and from technocratic efficiency to morally and spiritually grounded praxis—here conceptualized as Trans-Development.

Through the Gbewaa(h) Development Paradigm, grounded in the lived philosophies and practices of the Mole–Dagbani people, the study advances a system-thinking and system-transdisciplinary framework that integrates Indigenous metaphysics with contemporary debates in science, development, and philosophy. This trans-level theorization constitutes the core original contribution of the study, repositioning Ancestorcentrism not merely as a cultural or metaphysical lens, but as a comprehensive transdisciplinary system of thought capable of informing knowledge production, ethical leadership, and sustainable development.

In doing so, the study moves beyond reductionist, Western-centric development models and affirms African Indigenous Knowledge Systems as globally relevant epistemic frameworks for addressing complexity, sustainability, and human flourishing.

2.4 Ancestorcentrism and the Gbewaa Development Paradigm

The Gbewaa Development Paradigm is named in recognition of Naa Gbewaa, the foundational ancestral leader of the Mole–Dagbamba political and socio-cultural order across present-day Ghana, Togo, and Burkina Faso. Within Mole–Dagbamba historical consciousness, Naa Gbewaa is widely regarded as a unifying figure whose leadership and governance philosophy established enduring systems of social organization, political authority, ethical norms, and territorial coherence. His reign is consistently recalled in oral traditions, genealogical narratives, and ritual memory as a formative period of structured leadership and societal transformation.

The naming of the paradigm is therefore epistemic rather than symbolic. It reflects the Ancestorcentric principle that development knowledge and governance frameworks must be

grounded in historically validated Indigenous leadership systems and lived ancestral experience. The paradigm itself emerged from sustained ethnographic and transdisciplinary research among Mole–Dagbamba communities, where Naa Gbewaa continues to function as a central ancestral reference point in moral reasoning, authority, and communal identity.

The Gbewaa Development Paradigm operationalizes Ancestorcentrism by translating the Cosmic System Constellations of Cosmovision in Ancestorcentrism (CSCCA) into a coherent philosophical and practical framework for development. Within this paradigm, development is not reduced to economic growth or material accumulation; rather, it is understood as the harmonization and transformation of life across interconnected human, natural, and spiritual domains. Development is thus framed as a relational and ethical process embedded within cosmology, ecology, governance structures, and collective social responsibility.

Conceptually, the CSCCA functions as an integrative system composed of three interrelated macro-constellations that organize Indigenous knowledge, worldview, and praxis into a unified whole. For the purposes of this study, a constellation is defined as a structured pattern of related ideas, practices, concepts, or actors that collectively generate meaning. These constellations often operate through complementarity and polarity, including relational pairs such as human–nature, male–female, visible–invisible, or earth–cosmos. Meaning is produced not through separation, but through relational comparison and balance.

Within this framework, constellations describe how Indigenous cosmologies align cultural expressions, metaphysical principles, and practical sciences into coherent systems of understanding. Much like stars forming discernible patterns in the night sky, these relational elements converge to shape lived realities, ethical reasoning, and decision-making processes among the Mole–Dagbamba people. As such, the constellations serve as the analytical structures through which the logic, organization, and operational dynamics of Ancestorcentrism are explained in this work.

2.4.1. The What (Culture & Art / Social / Human / Biological)

Focus: The observable and experiential dimensions of human and social life.

Emphasis: Phenomena—both visible and invisible—captured through cultural expressions, oral traditions, and social behaviour.

This constellation encompasses how Mole–Dagbamba communities live, express, and reproduce identity through material culture, social norms, art, and human relations. It represents the experiential reality of being.

2.4.2. The Why (Spiritual / Metaphysical / Indigenous Knowledge & Philosophy)

Focus: Meaning, purpose, and cosmological orientation.

Emphasis: Worldviews, cosmovision and spiritualities that provide deeper meaning to Phenomenon where science and data alone cannot explain.

This constellation explains why existence matters—anchoring knowledge, ethics, and action in ancestral spirituality and moral philosophy. It provides the metaphysical logic that connects human life to the unseen world of ancestors, spirits, and cosmic order.

2.4.3. The How (Natural / Physical / Science, Technology & Innovation)

Focus: The processes and practices through which Indigenous science, technology, and innovation manifest.

Emphasis: Epistemology—knowing, structuring, and transmitting knowledge.

This constellation addresses how knowledge is produced, applied, and transmitted across generations. It captures the scientific and technological dimensions of IKS—methods of experimentation, ecological management, and technological creativity grounded in ancestral wisdom.

Together, these three constellations constitute the core operational logic of Ancestorcentrism, integrating culture and Art, philosophy, science, technology and innovations and endogenous development into a living cosmic system. They form the philosophical and analytical backbone of the CSCCA framework, enabling a holistic understanding of knowledge as relational, dynamic, multidimensional and transdisciplinary, rather than fragmented or purely data-driven. Figure 1 and 2 provided the conceptualization of the above.

Keys:

C.A= Culture and Art

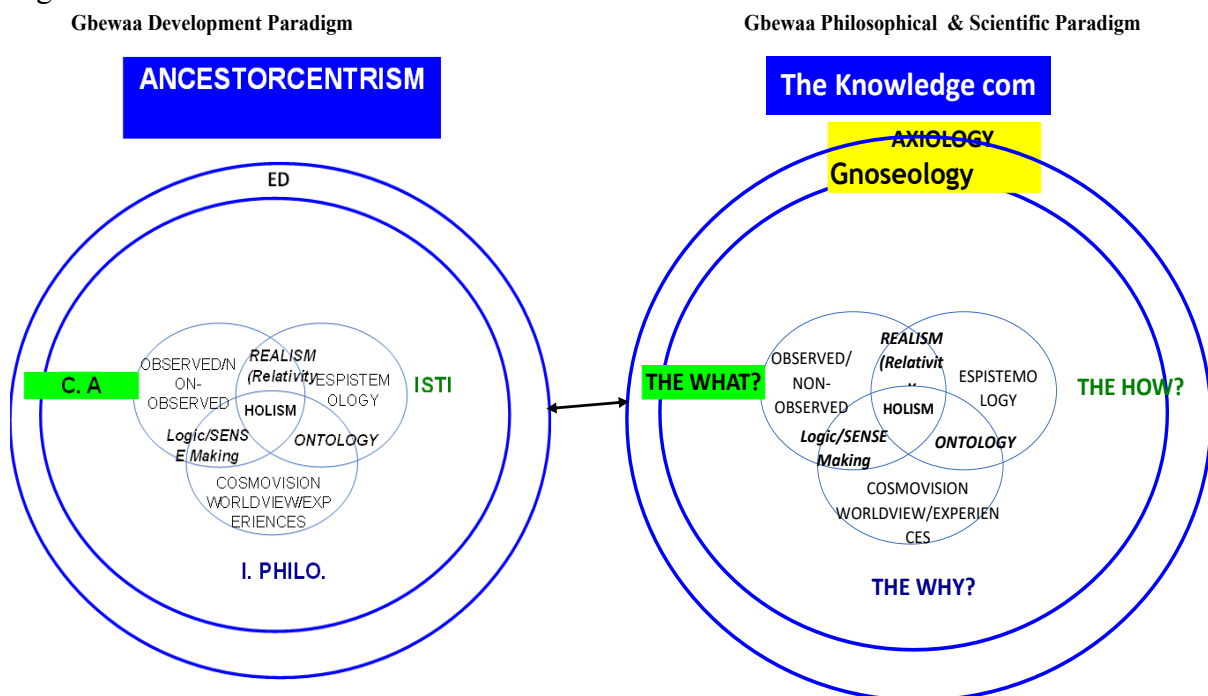
I.PHILO= Indigenous Philosophy and Metaphysics (Why / Meaning behind the C.A)

ISTI= Indigenous, Science, Technology and Innovations

ED=Endogenous Development (Becoming).

Trans-Level / Trans-Reality (Ontological Integration)

Figure 2.1 and 2.2



Source: Jambedu (2024)

Figure 2: The Philosophy Behind the Development.

i. Culture and Art: The Architecture of Being

From the figure above Culture and Art IS The Expression of Being.

“Culture and art are humanity’s memory; they are the archive of who we are and how we make sense of being.”

Within the Ancestorcentrism paradigm, culture and art constitute the primary expression of being—the foundational layer through which human existence is remembered, interpreted, and made meaningful. Far from serving decorative or secondary functions, culture and art operate as ontological infrastructures that encode collective memory, identity, values, and cosmological understanding. Through language, symbols, music, dance, dress, architecture, ritual, and oral traditions, communities translate lived experience into shared meaning. In this sense, culture and art function as existential technologies: they render abstract realities—such as morality, ancestry, suffering, hope, and belonging—into tangible and emotionally resonant forms that sustain continuity across generations (Millar, 2006; Wiredu, 2018; Jambedu et al., 2024).

Art, within this framework, is not merely expressive but epistemic and performative. It serves simultaneously as archive and action—preserving ancestral knowledge while actively shaping ethical sensibilities, social relations, and modes of perception. Visual arts, performance, storytelling, praise poetry, and ritual enactments transmit complex philosophical, ecological, and historical knowledge that often exceeds propositional language. As such, art becomes the “architecture of being,” a medium through which human existence is sculpted, narrated, and renewed. This understanding aligns with Indigenous epistemologies that reject the separation of aesthetics from knowledge and instead recognise creativity as a legitimate mode of knowing and sense-making (Chilisa, 2020; Chilisa et al., 2023; Nicolescu, 2018).

From the perspective of endogenous development, the revitalisation and continuity of cultural and artistic traditions are not acts of nostalgia but strategic pathways for sustainable transformation. Storytelling, oral literature, music, dance, indigenous architecture, and ritual practices carry embedded practical, ethical, and ecological intelligence that informs social cohesion, environmental stewardship, and adaptive resilience. Contemporary transdisciplinary scholarship increasingly affirms that development initiatives grounded in cultural meaning and identity are more likely to generate legitimacy, collective ownership, and long-term wellbeing (Millar et al., 2008; Morin, 2018; Manuel-Navarrete, 2025). In this sense, integrating culture and art into development practice transforms development from a purely material project into a civilizational process of becoming, where identity, knowledge, sustainability, and wellbeing are co-produced within plural and living knowledge systems.

ii. Philosophy: The Reflective Mirror of Culture and Art

The Quest for Meaning and Truth “Philosophy is the Quest for Meaning and Truth; it is the mirror through which culture and Art see itself thinking.”

If culture is the canvas and art the architecture of being, then philosophy is the reflective mirror through which these expressions see themselves thinking. Philosophy, especially within the Ancestorcentrism framework, is not an abstract or detached endeavor; rather, it is a living, communal inquiry into the deepest questions of existence, ethics, knowledge, and reality. It serves as the critical mechanism by which culture interprets itself, evaluates its own assumptions, and refines its worldview over time.

As the Culture-as-the-Driver-of-Development report emphasizes, sustainable development must begin “from within”—from the epistemologies, ontologies, and gnoseologies of a people. Philosophy thus becomes essential not just as a metaphysical pursuit, but as a developmental imperative. It guides how values are internalized, how meaning is constructed, and how transformations are morally anchored.

In the African context, philosophical traditions such as Ubuntu—which emphasize interconnectedness, community, and relational existence—offer a paradigm distinct from individualist Western metaphysics (Ramose, 2002; Mbiti, 1990). Here, the self is not an isolated subject but part of an ancestral continuum and ecological whole. Being is co-experienced, and truth emerges not through confrontation but through dialogue, consensus, and historical consciousness.

This orientation contrasts with the universalist tendencies of Western philosophy, offering instead a pluralistic and situated epistemology that affirms the validity of indigenous knowledge systems. Recent scholarship supports this relational view of knowledge. For example, Wiredu (2004) and Hountondji (2017) argue for the reconstruction of African philosophy based on indigenous categories, rather than borrowed European ones. Likewise, Mignolo (2009) contends that global knowledge hierarchies must be decolonized by foregrounding epistemic diversity.

In practice, this means that philosophy serves as the conceptual soil from which culturally grounded development grows. It provides the evaluative tools through which art is interpreted, culture is reimagined, and knowledge systems are assessed—not according to external standards, but in accordance with internally coherent values. It also enables communities to navigate the encounter with modernity and globalization without erasing their epistemic heritage.

Thus, as Culture-as-the-Driver-of-Development urges, integrating indigenous philosophy into education and policy is not optional—it is essential for cultivating cognitive justice and enabling genuinely sustainable development. Philosophy, in this light, is not a luxury but a navigational tool, guiding the process of endogenous development with wisdom rather than abstraction.

iii. Science, Technology, and Innovation:

“Science translates systems into designs structures; it measures what art imagines and philosophy contemplate. In short it provide prototypes be translated into practice”

Within the Ancestorcentrism framework, science is conceptualised as a translational practice—the domain that converts cultural imagination and philosophical reflection into testable systems, techniques, and technologies. Unlike dominant Western scientific traditions that privilege objectivity, detachment, and quantification, Ancestorcentrism advances an inclusive and relational epistemology in which empirical observation, lived experience, spirituality, and ethics are mutually reinforcing rather than opposed. Science, in this sense, is not separated from culture, ecology, or morality; it is a generational and context-sensitive pursuit of truth aimed at harmonising human activity with nature and the spiritual order (Millar, 2006; Chilisa, 2020; Wiredu, 2018; Jambedu et al., 2024). This position aligns with contemporary transdisciplinary

critiques of reductionist positivism and calls for epistemic plurality in addressing complex societal challenges (Morin, 2018; Nicolescu, 2018; McGregor & Gibbs, 2020).

Empirically, African Indigenous Knowledge Systems demonstrate that science and innovation have long been practiced as iterative, experimental, and adaptive processes embedded in communal life. Farmers, healers, metallurgists, builders, and artisans engage in systematic observation, testing, refinement, and transmission of knowledge across generations. These practices—often encoded in oral traditions, rituals, and symbolic systems—constitute dynamic forms of applied science, rather than static folklore. Such Indigenous sciences prioritise sustainability, resilience, and balance over domination and extraction, reinforcing the argument that IKS represent alternative scientific paradigms rather than pre-scientific knowledge forms (Millar, 2014; Millar et al., 2008; Plockey & Ahamed, 2016). Contemporary transdisciplinary scholarship increasingly recognises these modes of knowing as essential to sustainability governance and climate adaptation (Kelman, 2024; Manuel-Navarrete, 2025).

The integration of Indigenous Knowledge with modern Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) is therefore both a practical and ethical imperative. When approached through transdisciplinary collaboration, Indigenous ecological knowledge can enhance climate adaptation, low-cost technological innovation, sustainable architecture, biodiversity conservation, and value-based governance. Such integration, however, requires more than technical transfer; it demands cognitive justice, where Indigenous sciences are recognised as legitimate knowledge systems with their own ontological and ethical foundations (Chilisa et al., 2023; Mokiy, 2019; Mokiy & Lukyanova, 2021). Endogenous development thus calls for reconfiguring universities, research institutions, and innovation ecosystems into knowledge communities where elders, healers, scientists, and philosophers co-produce solutions for sustainable futures—positioning science as a relational, ethical, and culturally grounded force for collective wellbeing (Polk, 2015; McGregor, 2018; Mbembe, 2021).

iv. Endogenous Development as Praxis: The Art of Becoming

Endogenous Development (ED), within the Ancestorcentric framework, is best understood as praxis—the lived application of knowledge toward holistic wellbeing. Rather than a mechanical process of economic expansion, ED represents the ethical and contextual enactment of Indigenous knowledge systems to improve social, material, spiritual, and communal life. In contrast to dominant development paradigms centred on GDP, infrastructure, and quantification, Ancestorcentric ED reframes development as a journey of becoming, one that remains faithful to cultural origins, accountable to ancestry, and adaptive to contemporary realities (Millar, 2006; Millar et al., 2008; Millar, 2014; Jambedu et al., 2024). This positioning aligns with broader critiques of growth-centric development and supports the shift toward wellbeing-oriented frameworks (Stiglitz et al., 2018; Fioramonti et al., 2022).

As praxis, endogenous development embodies the classical understanding of reflection and action in unity, where knowledge is not merely accumulated but enacted through ethical intention and contextual relevance. Culture, art, philosophy, and science are not abstract domains; they are translated into systems of care, justice, governance, and innovation that shape everyday life. This conception resonates with transdisciplinary scholarship that

emphasizes knowledge co-production, contextual learning, and action-oriented integration across epistemic domains (Polk, 2015; McGregor, 2018; Lynch et al., 2021). Development, therefore, becomes a morally guided process that “thinks, feels, and creates,” rather than a purely technocratic intervention.

Central to this praxis is ontological integration, where knowledge domains function as interdependent expressions of a single cosmological logic. Culture and art sustain identity and memory; philosophy provides ethical clarity and metaphysical grounding; science and technology offer tools for experimentation and transformation; and development becomes the living enactment of this integrated system. Rather than operating through epistemic hierarchies, Indigenous cosmologies emphasize epistemic synergy, where being, knowing, and becoming form a continuous relational loop (Wiredu, 2018; Chilisa, 2020; Chilisa et al., 2023). This holistic logic aligns with contemporary transdisciplinary and complexity scholarship that rejects fragmentation in favour of relational and systemic understanding (Morin, 2018; Nicolescu, 2018; Moki, 2019).

At the heart of Ancestorcentric endogenous development lies the principle of self-sufficiency, understood not simply as economic independence but as ontological completeness. Self-sufficiency denotes the capacity of individuals and communities to mobilize their full resource base—material, ecological, cultural, spiritual, and moral—to sustain life with dignity and continuity. This conception echoes African relational ethics such as ubuntu and aligns with wellbeing-oriented development approaches that prioritize collective flourishing, peace, and sustainability over extractive accumulation (Sen, 2017; Raworth, 2017; UNDP, 2023). Importantly, this is not a romantic return to the past, but a reclaiming of agency in the present, enabling communities to shape futures that remain rooted in history while engaging modern challenges (Mbembe, 2021; UNECE, 2025).

2.5 Sectoral Applications of Endogenous Development

When guided by these principles, endogenous development proves transformative across all sectors:

Sector	Impact of Indigenous Knowledge Integration
Education	Restores identity through culturally relevant curricula and indigenous pedagogies
Health Systems	Revitalizes local healing traditions and complements biomedical models
Environment	Supports biocultural diversity, climate resilience, and sustainable land management
Gender Equality	Empowers women through traditional leadership roles and community-based mechanisms
Governance	Builds hybrid systems that harmonize traditional authority with formal state governance
Local Economies	Strengthens livelihoods through craft economies, agroecology, and indigenous value chains
Culture and Art	Sustains heritage through innovation in oral traditions, performance, architecture, and ritual
Science, Technology & Innovation (STI)	Advances context-specific technologies and knowledge co-creation; enables cross-pollination with global systems

These applications show that development does not have to displace culture to be effective; rather, when rooted in cultural and epistemic integrity, it becomes more resilient, adaptive, and meaningful.

3.0 Methodology.

The study is primarily a theory-building, transdisciplinary inquiry grounded in Indigenous empirical evidence. It commenced with a critical review of existing literature to examine limitations within global transdisciplinary scholarship and to identify gaps in the incorporation of Indigenous cosmologies into contemporary knowledge systems. Informed by this review, the empirical phase employed an exploratory, qualitative, multi-sited transdisciplinary research design, grounded in Indigenous Research Methodologies (IRM) and African relational epistemologies that prioritize context, spirituality, ancestral continuity, and collective knowledge generation.

Fieldwork was undertaken among Mole–Dagbamba and Mossi communities across Ghana, Togo, and Burkina Faso, selected due to their shared ancestral cosmologies alongside diverse cultural expressions. Participants—including elders, traditional healers, priests, artisans, farmers, women leaders, and youth—were engaged through purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure depth and cultural relevance.

A multi-stage methodological strategy was adopted, recognizing culturally embedded forms of expression—such as riddles, songs, proverbs, oral histories, chants, and mnemonic narratives—as valid sources of scientific knowledge (Groh, 2018; Warren et al., 1995). Central participatory tools included Three-Generational Trees (TGT) and Dynamic Posters and Mind Mapping (DPMP), which facilitated the mapping of genealogies, the tracing of cultural memory, and the interpretation of cosmological relationships (Smith, 2012; Chilisa, 2019).

Data collection was guided by a transdisciplinary ethnographic approach, incorporating storytelling, riddles and proverbs (SRP), conversational analysis (CA), chants and incantations (CIs), songs and recitals (SPRs), dirges and praise singing (DSPSA), critical arena discussions (CADs), focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), artefact examination (IAR), and visits to historically significant sites and culturally auspicious moments (HSAM). Together, these methods enabled access to both explicit and tacit dimensions of ancestral knowledge.

Data analysis proceeded in two phases. First, reflexive thematic and content analysis was employed to identify recurrent patterns across narratives and practices. Second, findings were interpreted through the CSCCA framework, organizing insights across the three domains (What, Why, How), four analytical intersections (logic, ontology, relational realism, holism), and two Trans-Level spaces (U_1 ancestral field and U_2 broader knowledge community). This approach positioned Indigenous cosmology not only as empirical data but also as an analytical and ontological lens.

Ethical considerations were anchored in Indigenous relational accountability, including respect for sacred knowledge, adherence to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), and validation of interpretations through community feedback and verification sessions.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This section presents and interprets the empirical findings derived from the application of the Cosmic System Constellations of Cosmovision in Ancestorcentrism (CSCCA) framework across three West African contexts—Ghana, Togo, and Burkina Faso. Drawing on data from 96 participants across six generational cohorts, and triangulating qualitative insights with critical literature, the analysis examines how Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are preserved, adapted, or transformed over time. The discussion is framed within a transdisciplinary perspective and supported by relevant scholarly sources.

Findings are organized in accordance with the CSCCA framework, structured around its three core domains: The What, The Why, and The How. The analysis begins with The What, which focuses on genealogical reconstruction and generational patterns as the experiential and cultural foundations of Indigenous Knowledge. Generational analysis is particularly vital in IKS research, as it reveals how cultural memory, ancestral consciousness, interpretive capacity, and lived cosmological knowledge vary and evolve across age groups.

The main finding of the study is that the Trans-Level within Ancestorcentrism and the Gbewaa Development Paradigm as illustrated using the CSCCA constitutes a system-thinking and system-transdisciplinary ontological framework capable of responding to complex and wicked problems across multiple domains of life. At this level, conventional disciplinary and interdisciplinary boundaries collapse, giving rise to a meta-integrative mode of knowledge production and social transformation in which science, philosophy, spirituality, culture, and governance are relationally aligned. Knowledge and reality are no longer compartmentalized; instead, they become fluid, complementary, co-created, and co-utilized across realms of being. This confirms that the Trans-Level provides a unique transdisciplinary science grounded in Indigenous cosmology, where development, leadership, and knowledge are ethically and ontologically integrated rather than technically fragmented.

The second major finding demonstrates that Ancestorcentrism operationalizes the Trans-Level in practice by providing coherent responses across multiple trans-domains, including Trans-Culturality, Trans-Leadership, Trans-Spirituality, Trans-Philosophy, and Trans-Science. As detailed in Table 4.1, these responses function as sub-findings, showing how ancestral ethics, African metaphysics, communal governance, and Indigenous epistemologies enable societies to navigate complexity through relational balance rather than control. The table illustrates that Ancestorcentrism supports transleading complexity, logic, intersubjectivity, sensemaking, tension management, power distribution, leverage, and the production of in vivo hybrid knowledge. Collectively, these sub-findings demonstrate that Ancestorcentrism does not merely theorize transdisciplinarity but enacts it as lived praxis, integrating cultural diversity, spiritual legitimacy, philosophical coherence, and scientific innovation into a unified development logic.

Together, these findings establish that the Trans-Level is not an abstract concept but a functional ontological layer that redefines how knowledge, leadership, and development operate in African Indigenous contexts and beyond. By grounding transdisciplinary practice in

ancestral cosmology and communal ethics, the Gbewaa Development Paradigm offers a distinctive and globally relevant contribution to contemporary debates on transdisciplinary science, governance, and sustainable development.

These findings align with contemporary transdisciplinary scholarship that frames wicked problems as requiring knowledge co-creation/co-production and convergence across disciplines and stakeholders (Polk, 2015; Kelman, 2024). They are also consistent with inclusive transdisciplinarity arguments that legitimize diverse cosmologies and Indigenous epistemologies as ‘multi-science’ foundations for sustainability and governance (Manuel-Navarrete, 2025). Further, the shift from GDP-centric development toward societal wellbeing is increasingly established within the Beyond-GDP and wellbeing measurement literature (OECD, n.d.; UNECE, 2025; Ura, 2012).”

Table 4.1: Ancestorcentrism’s Response to Trans-Cultural, Trans leadership, Trans-Religious, Trans-Philosophy, and Trans-Science

Trans-Concept	Ancestorcentrism’s Response	Trans-Cultural Link	Trans-Religious Link	Trans-Philosophy Link	Trans-Science Link
Transleading Complexity & Connections	Views reality as an interconnected triad (human–natural–spiritual worlds) governed by ancestral balance.	Embeds cultural diversity in interconnected solutions.	Recognizes sacred interconnectedness in environmental and social stewardship.	Interprets complexity through relational ontology and African metaphysics.	Integrates indigenous ecological science,tech. Innovation with modern systems science.
Trans leading Logic & Realities	Uses African epistemologies to reconcile contradictions (modern vs. indigenous, physical vs. spiritual) via ancestral mediation.	Balances multiple cultural logics.	Accepts multiple spiritual cosmologies as valid.	Applies logic of complementarity (included middle) in African philosophical reasoning.	Combines empirical evidence with sacred knowledge in problem-solving.
Trans leading Intersubjectivity	Builds shared understanding through oral traditions, rituals, and ancestral proverbs.	Bridges intercultural dialogue through shared narratives.	Creates interfaith dialogue platforms based on ancestral moral codes.	Uses African philosophical dialogics for consensus.	Translates traditional knowledge into terms usable in interdisciplinary science.
Trans leading Sensemaking	Frames problems within historical continuity, migration stories, and cosmological origins.	Provides cultural frames for interpreting crises.	Uses spiritual narratives to guide moral and ethical decision-making.	Anchors interpretation in African philosophical hermeneutics.	Aligns indigenous observation methods with scientific analysis.
Trans leading Tensions	Employs ancestral ethics and elder mediation to transform conflicts into social harmony.	Draws on intercultural peace traditions.	Utilizes interreligious reconciliation rituals.	Applies philosophical principles of harmony and complementarity.	Integrates conflict resolution approaches from community-based and scientific models.
Trans leading Power & Influence	Distributes leadership through elders, clan heads, and community councils rooted in spiritual legitimacy.	Respects diverse cultural governance forms.	Engages religious authorities across faiths.	Bases authority in ethical legitimacy over positional power.	Uses collaborative research networks to democratize knowledge.
Trans leading Leverage	Mobilizes change through symbolic acts, rituals, and seasonal events.	Uses cultural festivals as catalysts for action.	Employs sacred observances as rallying points.	Embeds philosophical symbolism to inspire action.	Uses low-cost indigenous innovations to influence larger systems.
Trans leading In Vivo, Hybrid Knowledge	Produces living, evolving knowledge blending ancestral wisdom, spirituality, and contemporary science.	Keeps cultural authenticity in knowledge creation.	Embeds sacred meaning into practical knowledge.	Synthesizes philosophical thought with applied solutions.	Merges indigenous ecological/agricultural practices with modern technology.
Trans-Philosophy	Ancestorcentrism is grounded in African metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology linking being, knowing, and doing.	Values cultural philosophical traditions.	Integrates religious moral frameworks with philosophical reasoning.	Provides holistic, life-affirming philosophical paradigms.	Offers a philosophical basis for inclusive scientific inquiry.
Trans-Science	Applies science as a partner to ancestral knowledge, not a replacement.	Preserves cultural integrity in scientific adaptation.	Aligns scientific goals with spiritual stewardship principles.	Ensures science operates within ethical-philosophical boundaries.	Generates hybrid methodologies combining indigenous and modern science.

4.2.1 Conceptualisation of Trans-Development:

Trans-Development is a system-transdisciplinary, value-anchored approach to human and societal advancement that moves beyond conventional development models premised on wealth accumulation, economic growth, and quantitative indicators such as GDP, GNP and other quantitative indices or development indicators. Emerging from Ancestorcentrism and endogenous development, Trans-Development reframes development as the ethical transformation of societies, oriented toward holistic wellbeing, balance, and sustainability where the current generations would use the available resources for their needs without compromising them for future generation usage across material, spiritual, ecological, and communal domains.

Within the Gbewaa(h) Development Paradigm, Trans-Development represents a qualitative shift in development logic that goes beyond the science and data of development indices to question the rationale behind the indices of science and data—from measurement to meaning, from growth to harmony, and from accumulation to equilibrium. It aligns with, but is not limited to, wellbeing-based frameworks such as Gross National Happiness (GNH), extending them by embedding development within ancestral cosmology, moral governance, and spiritual accountability and collective/communal wellbeing. Development is thus understood not as linear progress as seen using the western models, but as a relational and cyclical process that sustains identity, ethics, and intergenerational responsibility.

Conceptually, Trans-Development is distinguished by its insistence that material advancement must remain subordinate to moral legitimacy and spiritual validation. Knowledge, technology, and resources are not neutral instruments but are governed by axiological boundaries that define appropriate use for communal welfare, ecological integrity, and ancestral obligations. Development interventions are bottom up and outcomes are therefore assessed not by economic output alone, but by the degree to which they enhance collective wellbeing, social cohesion, ecological balance, and ancestral continuity and sustainability

4.2.2 Core Conceptual Dimensions of Trans-Development in the Gbewaah paradigm

At an operational level, Trans-Development is characterized by the following interrelated dimensions:

Ethical (Axiological) Orientation

Development is regulated by moral principles that distinguish right from wrong uses of knowledge, power, and resources. Ethical legitimacy precedes technical efficiency.

Spiritually Validated Knowledge (Gnosiology)

Authority and legitimacy are derived not solely from empirical verification, but also from ancestral wisdom, spiritual insight, and cosmological order.

Communal Governance of Development

Development decisions are collectively regulated through Indigenous knowledge communities, including elders, custodians, and sacred authorities, rather than centralized technocratic elites.

Recognition of Higher Moral Authority

Trans-Development acknowledges divine, ancestral, or cosmological authority (God / All-Father) as guiding moral compasses for human action and governance.

Transdisciplinary and Transcultural Praxis

It integrates science, philosophy, spirituality, ethics, and local practice into a unified, context-sensitive development praxis, transcending disciplinary and cultural silos.

Wellbeing-Centred Orientation

The ultimate goal is not wealth maximization but holistic wellbeing—including identity, harmony, ecological sustainability, social justice, and moral fulfilment.

Trans-Development in the Gbewaa(h) Paradigm

Trans-Development within the Gbewaa(h) Development Paradigm constitutes a Trans-Level development logic—one that transforms wealth into worth, growth into wellbeing, and knowledge into wisdom. It provides a culturally grounded, spiritually informed, and system-transdisciplinary response to contemporary development crises, positioning Indigenous epistemologies not as alternatives to development, but as advanced civilizational frameworks for navigating complexity, uncertainty, and wicked problems.

4.2.3. Wealth: Total Resource Potential

In CSCCA, Wealth is not limited to capital or material assets. It is understood as the total resource base, both visible and invisible, that a community possesses and inherits. This includes:

Natural Resources – land, water, minerals, forests, biodiversity

Human Resources – knowledge, labor, creativity, social cohesion

Spiritual Resources – ancestral wisdom, rituals, cosmological ethics

Scientific & Technological Resources – traditional tools, modern innovations, hybrid knowledge systems

This broadened understanding recognizes value in potential—what may be dormant or unseen, yet capable of meaningful transformation. It affirms that Indigenous communities are not poor by default but often undervalued within extractive models of knowledge and economy (Wane, 2011; Hoppers, 2020).

4.2.4. Worth: Realized Developmental State

Worth is the actualized state of development, the outcome of a successful trans-level conversion of potential into socially meaningful structures. However, unlike conventional development metrics which fixate on wealth accumulation or industrial expansion, Worth is evaluated through existential, ethical, and communal criteria: Being, Becoming, Existence and Essence.

Worth is the lived experience of development that is felt, seen, shared, and inherited. It transcends gross material output and instead centers Gross Societal Wellbeing (GSW) — a measurement akin to Bhutan's Gross National Happiness, but grounded in African ancestral values, communal ethics, and cosmological balance (Nabudere, 2011).

4.2.5. Social Enhancement and Gross Societal Wellbeing (GSW)

All stages of the Ancestorcentrism model culminate in Social Enhancement—the equitable redistribution of realized worth into systems that nourish communal wellbeing. This includes:

- Access to education that respects and integrates indigenous epistemologies
- Holistic health systems that blend traditional and modern knowledge
- Ecological governance that preserves biodiversity and ancestral lands
- Cultural systems that regenerate identity, dignity, and belonging

Thus, the model measures success not in GDP, but in dignified life, cosmic balance, and intergenerational continuity.

5. The Trans-Level as a Meta-Integration.

The paper advances the Trans-Level as a meta-integrative ontological, epistemic, and methodological horizon through which Ancestorcentrism operates most fully. Unlike interdisciplinary or additive approaches, the Trans-Level produces a new equilibrium of meaning and praxis, enabling the convergence of philosophy, science, spirituality, culture, leadership, and development into a coherent system of lived reality. This positioning aligns with transdisciplinary ontology, which emphasizes integration across levels of reality rather than coordination among disciplines (Nicolescu, 2018; McGregor & Gibbs, 2020). The Trans-Level thus functions as a system-transdisciplinary space where theory and practice, ethics and innovation, and Indigenous and global knowledge systems are reconstituted into a unified logic of action.

At its core, the Trans-Level mediates the ontological conversion of Wealth into Worth, culminating in Gross Societal Wellbeing (GSW). This cyclical logic departs from linear, GDP-centred development trajectories and reflects an Ancestorcentric cosmology in which development is understood as a moral, relational, and intergenerational responsibility rather than a technocratic outcome. This framing resonates strongly with Beyond-GDP and wellbeing scholarship, which critiques economic growth metrics for their inability to capture lived wellbeing, social cohesion, and ecological sustainability (Costanza et al., 2016; Fioramonti et al., 2022; Stiglitz et al., 2018). By embedding wellbeing within ancestral ethics and communal harmony, the Trans-Level offers a culturally grounded alternative to dominant development evaluation regimes.

Philosophically, the Trans-Level is inseparable from Trans-Reality, which represents the highest ontological plane within Ancestorcentrism. While science explains the how and development addresses the what, Trans-Reality engages the deeper why—the purpose, meaning, and moral logic of existence. This aligns with Nicolescu’s notion of the Hidden Third, where subject, object, and meaning converge beyond reductionist epistemologies (Nicolescu, 2018). Through an integrated logic of What, Why, How, Who, Where, and When, Trans-Reality reframes inquiry as an ontological practice, transforming knowledge into lived wisdom and embedding decision-making within ancestral continuity and cosmological accountability (Millar, 2006; Wiredu, 2018).

Epistemically, the Trans-Level constitutes a transepistemic space in which multiple knowledge systems coexist without hierarchical subordination. Empirical science, Indigenous knowledge, philosophy, spirituality, and lived experience are treated as complementary modes of knowing, validated through ethical legitimacy, ancestral authority, and communal resonance rather than measurement alone. This directly challenges positivist reductionism and affirms cognitive justice, echoing calls for inclusive transdisciplinarity and “multi-science” approaches to sustainability governance (Manuel-Navarrete, 2025; Chilisa et al., 2023). In this configuration, truth is relational and contextual, emerging through alignment between knowledge, morality, and lived realities.

Finally, the Trans-Level extends transleadership by situating leadership within an explicitly ancestral, cosmological, and non-linear temporal framework. While transleadership emphasizes navigating complexity and emergent knowledge, the Ancestorcentric Trans-Level deepens this logic by grounding leadership in ancestral ethics, spiritual accountability, and cyclical conceptions of time (McGregor & Donnelly, 2014; Morin, 2018). This temporal ontology links past, present, future, and the unknown, ensuring that present decisions are evaluated in light of intergenerational consequences. By enabling trans-cultural and trans-spiritual integration without erasing difference, the Trans-Level transforms diversity into a resource for collective sense-making and positions Ancestorcentrism as a lived praxis for addressing wicked problems in a plural, uncertain world.

9. Trans-Level and the Concept of Time

A defining feature of the Trans-Level is its non-linear conception of time. Time is understood as cyclical and relational, linking past, present, future, and the unknown into a continuous flow of knowledge and responsibility. At the Trans-Level, ancestral memory informs present action, and present decisions are evaluated in light of their implications for unborn generations. This temporal ontology transforms knowledge into wisdom and theory into practice, embedding development within long-term cosmological accountability.

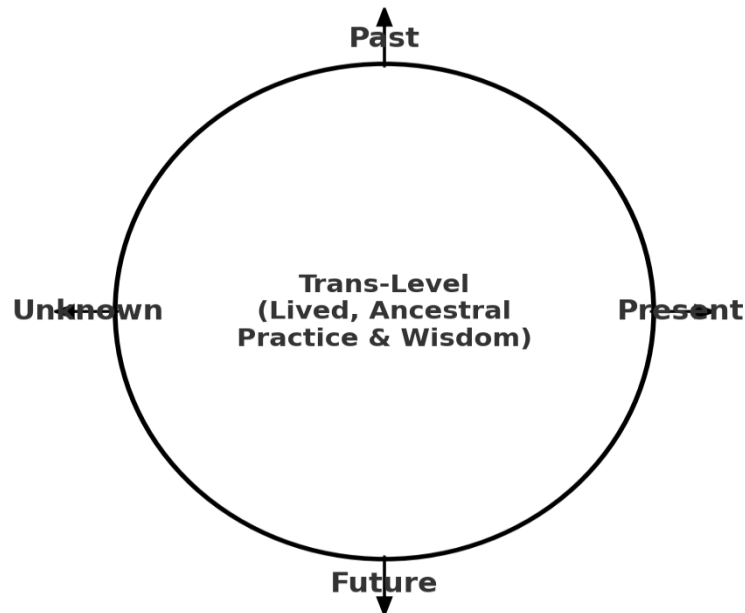
Ancestorcentrism trans level conception of time is summarise in three reflections capture its essence and frame the argument of this paper:

“At the Trans-Level, past, present, and future converge in a cyclical form, transforming knowledge into lived, ancestral practice and practical wisdom.”

“The Trans-Level bridges past, present, future, and unknown—linking knowledge to wisdom, and theory to practice.”

“The Trans-Level unites the known and the unknown, weaving time, knowledge, and practice into a cosmological whole.”

Cyclical Convergence at the Trans-Level



Together, the Trans-Level position not as an abstract construct, but as a meta-integrative dimension of knowledge and being, grounded in lived ancestral continuity and oriented toward future.

6. Trans-Culturality, Trans-Spirituality, and Lived Praxis

The Trans-Level further enables trans-cultural and trans-spiritual integration without erasing difference. Cultural diversity, spiritual plurality, and multiple cosmologies are not treated as obstacles but as resources for collective sense-making. By operating above rigid cultural or religious boundaries, the Trans-Level allows societies to co-create meaning, ethics, and solutions while remaining grounded in their ancestral identities.

4.7 Discussion

4.7 Discussion: The “So What?” of Science and Development

The central contribution of this study lies in addressing a foundational question often overlooked in conventional development science: What do development knowledge, indicators, and interventions actually achieve for human flourishing? While dominant paradigms generate extensive data and metrics, they frequently fail to explain how such measures translate into lived wellbeing, peace, social harmony, and collective happiness within communities and societies. High GDP or per capita income does not necessarily correspond with access to food, water, health, education, or social stability. The Trans-Level, as theorised in this paper, responds directly to this gap by situating development knowledge within an ontological and ethical horizon grounded in community life, local resources, and Indigenous

science, technology, and innovation. Development, from this perspective, begins with people and place, addressing both vertical (material, spiritual) and horizontal (social, cultural) dimensions of wellbeing in ways that align with lived cultural realities (Jambedu et al., 2024; Stiglitz et al., 2018).

At the Trans-Level, development knowledge is no longer treated as neutral or value-free expertise. Instead, it becomes inseparable from identity, morality, and responsibility. Reality is understood as relational and dynamic, and theory is inseparable from practice. In this sense, the Trans-Level functions simultaneously as an epistemic space—governing how knowledge is generated, validated, and applied—and as an ontological layer that shapes how wellbeing, coexistence, and responsibility are understood and inhabited. This dual function enables development to move beyond technical effectiveness toward existential relevance, echoing transdisciplinary scholarship that emphasises complexity, relationality, and meaning in addressing wicked problems (Kelman, 2024; McGregor & Gibbs, 2020).

Operationalised through Ancestorcentrism and the Gbewaa Development Paradigm, the Trans-Level introduces a new ontological structure into development discourse. While earlier work on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and endogenous development successfully established cultural autonomy and local resource mobilisation, it stopped short of theorising how Indigenous epistemologies interact with contemporary science, governance institutions, and global knowledge systems at a meta-integrative level. This study bridges that gap by positioning Ancestorcentrism as a system-transdisciplinary framework in which culture, philosophy, science, ethics, spirituality, and governance are organised through the Cosmic System Constellations of Cosmvision in Ancestorcentrism (CSCCA). Within this structure, the Trans-Level mediates the conversion of Wealth (total potential) into Worth (realised communal wellbeing), culminating in Gross Societal Wellbeing (GSW). Unlike GDP-centred models that privilege individual accumulation, GSW evaluates how people live together—peacefully, ethically, and sustainably—dimensions increasingly recognised in wellbeing-oriented frameworks such as Gross National Happiness and inclusive transdisciplinarity (Ura et al., 2012, 2023; Manuel-Navarrete, 2025).

Finally, the Trans-Level extends contemporary debates on transleadership and governance by embedding leadership within an explicitly ancestral, ethical, and cosmological ontology. While transleadership highlights the need to navigate complexity, contradiction, and emergent knowledge, the Ancestorcentric Trans-Level deepens this logic by grounding authority in axiology (ethical boundaries), gnosiology (modes of validation), knowledge communities, and divine accountability. Leadership thus becomes a collective, morally regulated, and future-oriented process rather than a technocratic or individualised function (McGregor & Donnelly, 2014; Morin, 2018). Governance, within the CSCCA, emerges from relational alignment among elders, knowledge custodians, and spiritual authorities, ensuring that development interventions remain culturally coherent, ethically legitimate, and intergenerationally accountable. In this way, the Trans-Level reframes development not as the pursuit of growth, but as the cultivation of peace, happiness, and shared human flourishing at community, national, and global scales.

8.Scholarly Contribution and Conclusion

This study makes a distinctive scholarly contribution by introducing the Trans-Level as a missing ontological layer in contemporary development and transdisciplinary theory. By integrating axiology (ethics), gnosiology (knowledge validation), knowledge community, and divine authority, it extends earlier formulations of Ancestorcentrism and endogenous development into what is conceptualised as Trans-Development. Within this framework, development is no longer treated as a purely technical or economic process, but as an ethical, cosmological, and relational undertaking grounded in ancestral continuity and communal responsibility. The Gbewaa(h) Development Paradigm operationalises this shifts by repositioning development as the transformation of knowledge and resources into collective wellbeing rather than individual accumulation.

The introduction of the Trans-Level fundamentally reorients how development is understood and evaluated. It moves assessment beyond data, indicators, and individual outcomes toward questions of meaning, peace, social cohesion, ecological balance, and intergenerational flourishing—dimensions that conventional quantitative indices cannot adequately capture. As a meta-integrative space, the Trans-Level enables the convergence of trans-development, trans-science, trans-philosophy, trans-leadership, trans-spirituality, and trans-culturality into a coherent system of lived praxis. In doing so, this study repositions African Indigenous cosmologies not as local or alternative knowledge systems, but as advanced system-transdisciplinary frameworks with global relevance, offering a robust ontological and ethical foundation for addressing contemporary crises of sustainability, leadership, and human flourishing.

9. Conclusion

This study concludes that meaningful sustainable development cannot be adequately achieved through science, data, and quantitative indicators alone. While such tools are valuable, they remain insufficient for capturing the lived realities of people, particularly the ethical, spiritual, relational, and cultural dimensions that define collective wellbeing. By advancing Ancestorcentrism and operationalising it through the Gbewaa Development Paradigm and the Trans-Level, this paper demonstrates that development must be understood as a holistic, relational, and morally grounded process. Development interventions should therefore be evaluated not merely by economic growth or technical efficiency, but by their capacity to enhance Gross National Wellbeing (GNW)—manifested in Gross National Happiness, peace, social harmony, ecological balance, and intergenerational continuity. In this framing, national progress is measured by how peacefully and meaningfully people live together, rather than by the volume of material wealth produced. The Trans-Level thus provides a new ontological and epistemic foundation for rethinking development as the transformation of knowledge into wisdom, wealth into worth, and growth into shared human flourishing.

10. Recommendations

Policy and Practice Recommendation

Development policies and interventions should explicitly integrate holistic wellbeing frameworks that move beyond GDP and sectoral indicators to include ethical legitimacy, cultural coherence, social harmony, and spiritual wellbeing. Governments, development agencies, and planners should adopt context-specific Gross National Wellbeing (GNW) metrics—grounded in Indigenous cosmologies and communal values—to assess whether development initiatives genuinely translate into happiness, peace, and national harmony at community and national levels.

Research and Knowledge Systems Recommendation

Future research should deepen the application of system-transdisciplinary and Indigenous ontological frameworks, such as the Trans-Level, in development studies, governance, and sustainability science. Scholars and institutions are encouraged to institutionalise Indigenous Knowledge Systems as legitimate scientific and philosophical foundations, enabling co-production of knowledge among elders, scientists, policymakers, and communities. Such approaches will strengthen the relevance, ethical grounding, and transformative potential of development research and practice in addressing wicked and complex global challenges.

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