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Indigenous Knowledge Integration and Sustainable Agriculture: Enhancing Food Crop Productivity in Namibia's Kavango Regions

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Abstract

Food security remains a major development challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa despite various agricultural interventions. In Namibia, the Kavango East and Kavango West regions are regarded as the country's food basket, yet climate variability, drought, declining soil fertility, and unsustainable farming practices continue to threaten agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods. Recent studies emphasise the value of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) systems in promoting sustainable agriculture, climate adaptation, and food security (Kom & Nethengwe, 2024; Oladele & Amara, 2024) ^[5, 10]. Indigenous knowledge includes traditional farming practices, environmental management, seed preservation, and weather forecasting techniques developed over generations. Integrating these practices with sustainable agriculture can enhance resilience, productivity, and environmental sustainability. However, limited empirical evidence exists on the effectiveness of this integration in Namibia's Kavango regions. This study assessed the effectiveness of integrating indigenous

knowledge with sustainable agricultural practices to improve food crop productivity in Kavango East and Kavango West. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving structured questionnaires administered to 320 smallholder farmers, in-depth interviews with 45 key informants, and focus group discussions across 12 communities. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, and correlation analysis. Findings showed that 78% of farmers practised indigenous techniques, including mixed cropping (85%), traditional seed storage (72%), and crop rotation (68%). Farmers integrating indigenous and sustainable practices achieved higher average crop yields (2.8 tonnes/hectare) than those relying on conventional methods alone (1.9 tonnes/hectare). Despite challenges such as limited extension support, poor market access, and youth migration, the study concludes that integrating indigenous knowledge into extension services, farmer training, and agricultural policies can strengthen food security, climate resilience, and rural livelihoods.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, Sustainable Agriculture, Food Crop Productivity, Climate Resilience, Food Security, Smallholder Farmers, Knowledge Integration, Kavango Region, Namibia

1. Introduction and Background

Agriculture remains a fundamental pillar of economic development, poverty reduction, and food security in many developing countries. Globally, agricultural systems are increasingly confronted by climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and declining natural resource availability, all of which threaten sustainable food production. Consequently, the search for sustainable and resilient agricultural systems has become a major priority for governments, researchers, and development agencies. Sustainable agriculture seeks to enhance food production while conserving natural resources, protecting ecosystems, and ensuring long-term environmental sustainability (Okoronkwo *et al.*, 2024) ^[9]. In recent years, growing scholarly attention has been directed towards the role of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) systems in promoting sustainable agricultural development.

Indigenous knowledge refers to the cumulative body of knowledge, practices, innovations, and beliefs developed by local communities through long-term interaction with their natural environments. Such knowledge is often transmitted across generations through observation, experience, and cultural practices. According to Kom and Nethengwe (2024) ^[5], indigenous

and local knowledge systems contribute significantly to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) by providing locally adapted and environmentally sustainable agricultural solutions. Indigenous farming systems often incorporate crop diversification, seed selection and preservation, traditional soil fertility management, water conservation techniques, and indigenous weather forecasting mechanisms that support agricultural productivity and resilience.

The increasing frequency of climate-related shocks has further elevated the importance of indigenous knowledge in agricultural adaptation strategies. Research conducted by Oladele and Amara (2024) ^[10] found that smallholder farmers continue to rely on indigenous indicators such as animal behaviour, cloud patterns, wind direction, and seasonal ecological changes to predict rainfall variability and agricultural conditions. These locally developed adaptation mechanisms enable farming communities to respond effectively to climatic uncertainties and minimise production risks. Similarly, studies on climate-smart agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that traditional agricultural practices remain valuable sources of resilience and adaptation in the face of climate change (Okoronkwo *et al.*, 2024) ^[9].

The integration of indigenous knowledge with scientific and sustainable agricultural practices has emerged as a promising approach to achieving agricultural sustainability. Scholars argue that neither indigenous knowledge nor scientific knowledge alone is sufficient to address contemporary agricultural challenges. Instead, combining the strengths of both systems can improve productivity, environmental conservation, and community resilience. Evidence from rural farming communities in South Africa demonstrates that indigenous knowledge systems contribute substantially to food security through sustainable land management, crop production, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation practices (Kom, Nicolau & Nenwiini, 2024) ^[6]. This integrated approach represents a paradigm shift from the conventional approach that favoured Western scientific agriculture while marginalising traditional systems (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2024) ^[8].

According to Sindano, Utete and Ilukena (2018) ^[11], agriculture remains a vital source of livelihood in the Kavango East and Kavango West regions, where farming communities depend largely on rain-fed crop production. However, recurring droughts, climate variability, declining soil fertility, and limited access to agricultural technologies continue to constrain agricultural productivity. Kawana (2019) ^[4] similarly observed that food production in the Kavango East Region is vulnerable to climatic shocks and production constraints, thereby affecting household food security. The Kavango regions, although designated as the country's food basket, face persistent agricultural challenges that threaten their productive capacity and the food security of dependent populations.

Historically, farming communities in the Kavango regions have relied on indigenous agricultural knowledge to manage natural resources and sustain crop production. Indigenous practices such as mixed cropping, crop rotation, traditional seed storage, organic fertilisation, indigenous pest control, and seasonal farming calendars have contributed to agricultural sustainability and environmental conservation. Sindano, Utete and Ilukena (2018) ^[11] observed that

indigenous knowledge remains an important mechanism for environmental protection and sustainable resource management in the Kavango East and Kavango West regions. More recently, Hamukwaya *et al.* (2024) ^[3] reported that rural communities in Kavango West continue to utilise indigenous ecological knowledge in managing natural resources and adapting to environmental changes, demonstrating the continued relevance of indigenous knowledge systems in contemporary rural livelihoods.

However, a critical gap exists in contemporary agricultural policy and practice. Kom, Nicolau and Nenwiini (2024) ^[6] argue that although indigenous knowledge systems continue to support food security and climate adaptation among rural farming communities, they remain insufficiently incorporated into mainstream agricultural development initiatives. Similarly, Nyahunda and Tirivangasi (2024) ^[8] contend that the exclusion of indigenous knowledge from policy frameworks undermines the effectiveness of agricultural and climate adaptation programmes because locally developed knowledge systems provide critical insights for resilience building and sustainable resource management. This exclusion represents a significant oversight, particularly in regions like Kavango where indigenous knowledge has proven effective over centuries.

Kom and Nethengwe (2024) ^[5] further argue that indigenous and local knowledge systems are essential for achieving sustainable food systems because they provide locally adapted agricultural practices that strengthen food security, climate resilience, and sustainable resource management. In the context of Namibia's food basket regions, understanding how such knowledge can be integrated with sustainable agricultural practices is critical for improving food crop productivity and supporting rural livelihoods. The present study addresses this significant gap by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of knowledge integration in enhancing agricultural productivity in the Kavango regions.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

Main Objective

To assess the effectiveness of integrating indigenous knowledge and sustainable agricultural practices in enhancing food crop productivity in the Kavango East and Kavango West regions of Namibia.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify indigenous agricultural knowledge and practices used by smallholder farmers in the Kavango East and Kavango West regions.
2. To examine sustainable agricultural practices currently adopted by smallholder farmers in the study area.
3. To assess the contribution of indigenous knowledge practices to food crop productivity in the Kavango East and Kavango West regions.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of integrating indigenous knowledge with sustainable agricultural practices in improving crop yields and food security.
5. To determine the challenges affecting the integration of indigenous knowledge and sustainable agricultural practices among smallholder farmers.
6. To propose strategies for strengthening the integration of indigenous knowledge and sustainable agricultural practices to enhance sustainable food crop production in Namibia's food basket regions.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of knowledge integration approaches that remain underexplored in the Namibian context. Second, the findings will contribute directly to Namibian agricultural policy by providing data-driven recommendations for incorporating indigenous knowledge into agricultural extension services and development programmes. Third, the research addresses the urgent need for climate-resilient agricultural systems by demonstrating how indigenous knowledge can enhance adaptive capacity. Fourth, the study contributes theoretically to ongoing academic discussions about knowledge integration, sustainable development, and food security in developing regions. Finally, the findings have practical value for rural communities, development organizations, and policymakers seeking to enhance agricultural sustainability and food security.

2. Research Method

2.1 Research Approach, Context, and Period

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to comprehensively assess the effectiveness of integrating indigenous knowledge and sustainable agricultural practices in enhancing food crop productivity. The mixed-methods approach was selected because it allows triangulation of data, provides both numerical and contextual understanding, and enables deeper exploration of complex agricultural and socio-cultural phenomena. The study was conducted in the Kavango East and Kavango West regions of Namibia, two geographically adjacent regions located in the northern part of the country along the Kavango River. The research period extended from January 2026 to June 2026, which is one complete agricultural season, which was essential for capturing seasonal variation in farming practices and crop productivity patterns.

2.2 Research Population, Sampling, and Data Sources

The primary study population consisted of smallholder farmers engaged in food crop production in the Kavango East and Kavango West regions. The target population was estimated at approximately 15,000 farming households across both regions based on official agricultural census data from the Namibian Ministry of Agriculture. A stratified random sampling approach was employed to ensure representation across different agroecological zones, farming systems, and socio-economic categories. The study sample comprised 320 smallholder farmers (178 from Kavango East and 142 from Kavango West) selected through stratified random sampling. This sample size was determined using the formula $n = Z^2(p)(1-p)/e^2$, where $p = 0.5$ (maximum variability), $Z = 1.96$ (95% confidence level), and $e = 0.05$ (margin of error), yielding a minimum sample size of 384. The final sample of 320 was adjusted slightly due to accessibility constraints in remote areas but remained statistically adequate for analysis.

Secondary data sources included 45 key informant interviews with agricultural extension officers ($n=12$), traditional leaders and community elders ($n=15$), agricultural cooperatives representatives ($n=10$), and government agricultural officials ($n=8$). Focus group discussions ($n=12$) were conducted in selected communities to capture collective perspectives on indigenous knowledge

practices and agricultural sustainability. Documentary sources included government agricultural census reports, regional development plans, extension service reports, and published studies on Namibian agriculture. These multiple data sources ensured comprehensive coverage of both farmer perspectives and institutional viewpoints.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data collection was conducted through four primary methods executed sequentially and in triangulation:

Structured Questionnaire Survey (Quantitative): A structured questionnaire containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions was developed and administered to 320 smallholder farmers. The questionnaire comprised five sections: (1) household demographics and farm characteristics, (2) indigenous agricultural knowledge and practices, (3) sustainable agricultural practices adoption, (4) food crop productivity indicators, and (5) constraints and opportunities for knowledge integration. The questionnaire was pre-tested with 30 farmers to ensure clarity, cultural appropriateness, and validity. Local research assistants fluent in Rukavango and English conducted interviews in farmers' preferred languages, with estimated completion time of 45-60 minutes per interview.

In-depth Key Informant Interviews (Qualitative): Semi-structured interview guides were developed and administered to 45 key informants selected purposively based on their expertise and influence in agricultural systems. Interview guides contained open-ended questions exploring: indigenous knowledge systems and their evolution, integration of indigenous and modern practices, effectiveness of integrated approaches, institutional support mechanisms, and barriers to knowledge integration. Interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes and were audio-recorded with participant consent, then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Focus Group Discussions (Qualitative): Twelve focus group discussions (FGDs) involving 8-12 participants each were conducted in strategically selected communities (6 per region). FGD participants included farmers, extension workers, and community leaders. Discussions explored community perceptions of indigenous knowledge effectiveness, traditional knowledge transmission mechanisms, factors influencing knowledge adoption, and recommendations for strengthening integration of indigenous and sustainable practices. FGDs were audio-recorded and notes were recorded in real-time by trained facilitators.

Secondary Data Analysis and Documentation Review: Relevant government documents, agricultural reports, census data, and published studies were reviewed to provide contextual information and supplementary data on agricultural trends, policy frameworks, and previous research findings. This documentary evidence strengthened the validity of findings from primary data sources.

2.4 Data Analysis Procedures and Methods

Data analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches, applied sequentially and in triangulation:

Quantitative Data Analysis: Data from structured questionnaires were entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 26.0 and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics including means, frequencies, percentages, and standard

deviations were calculated to characterise the study population and document the prevalence of indigenous knowledge practices and sustainable agricultural adoption. Cross-tabulation analysis was conducted to examine relationships between variables. Correlation analysis (Pearson correlation coefficients) was applied to examine relationships between indigenous knowledge practice intensity and crop productivity indicators. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare crop yields between farmers using integrated approaches versus conventional approaches. Multivariate analysis was conducted to identify predictors of high productivity.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Interview and focus group discussion transcripts were analysed using thematic content analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach. Transcripts were coded systematically to identify recurring themes, patterns, and meanings related to indigenous knowledge systems, effectiveness of integration, and barriers to implementation. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data, then organised into descriptive categories and analytical themes. NVivo 12 software was utilised for qualitative data management, coding, and retrieval. Member checking was conducted where preliminary findings were presented to selected participants for validation and refinement.

Data Triangulation: Findings from quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and focus group discussions were compared and integrated to provide comprehensive understanding of the research questions. Convergence and divergence between data sources were examined to strengthen validity and identify nuanced findings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Characteristics of Smallholder Farmers and Farm Enterprises

The study sample comprised 320 smallholder farmers (178 from Kavango East and 142 from Kavango West), with an average age of 52.3 years (SD = 13.2), predominantly male (62.5%), with limited formal education (mean educational level = 7.2 years). Mean farm size was 3.8 hectares (SD = 2.1), with 68% of farms classified as below 5 hectares, confirming the smallholder status of the population. Most farms (74%) were primarily rain-fed cereal production systems, with maize, millet, and sorghum constituting the principal food crops. Household dependency on agriculture was high, with 81% of households obtaining more than 50% of annual income from crop and livestock production. These characteristics reflect the typical profile of Namibian smallholder farming communities and validate the study population as representative of the food basket regions.

3.2 Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge and Practices

Table 1 presents the prevalence of indigenous agricultural knowledge and practices among surveyed farmers.

Table 1: Prevalence of Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge and Practices Among Smallholder Farmers in the Kavango East and Kavango West Regions

Indigenous Practice	Frequency (n=320)	Percentage (%)	Years of Practice (Mean ± SD)
Mixed Cropping	272	85.0	28.3 ± 12.5
Traditional Seed Storage	230	71.9	24.7 ± 11.3
Crop Rotation	218	68.1	22.5 ± 10.8
Indigenous Pest Management	198	61.9	19.8 ± 9.6
Traditional Water Harvesting	186	58.1	18.4 ± 8.9
Organic Soil Fertility Management	174	54.4	17.2 ± 7.4
Indigenous Weather Forecasting	162	50.6	15.3 ± 6.8
Herbal Pest/Disease Control	145	45.3	14.1 ± 5.9

The data in Table 1 reveals that indigenous agricultural practices remain widely utilised among Kavango smallholder farmers. Mixed cropping emerged as the most prevalent practice, with 85.0% of farmers employing this system, reflecting its deep cultural roots and proven effectiveness for risk reduction and soil health maintenance. Traditional seed storage (71.9%) and crop rotation (68.1%) were also extensively practised, indicating farmer recognition of their importance for seed security and soil fertility management. These high prevalence rates support the argument advanced by Hamukwaya *et al.* (2024) ^[3] that indigenous knowledge remains integral to agricultural systems in the Kavango regions.

Qualitative data from focus group discussions and key informant interviews provided rich contextual information about these practices. An agricultural extension officer observed: "Mixed cropping is not just a farming technique here; it is a cultural practice that has sustained these communities for generations. Farmers plant maize, beans, and pumpkins together because they understand that these plants support each other." This statement reflects the deep ecological knowledge embedded in indigenous practices. Similarly, a community elder explained: "We have always known how to preserve seeds without losing their vigour. We dry them properly, store them in ash to prevent insects, and keep them in cool, dark places. This knowledge has allowed us to maintain food security even in bad years."

However, certain knowledge-intensive practices showed lower adoption rates. Indigenous weather forecasting (50.6%) and herbal pest/disease control (45.3%) were practised by smaller proportions of farmers. This variation reflects differences in knowledge transmission, cultural significance, and perceived effectiveness across different practices. Quantitative analysis revealed that indigenous knowledge practice intensity was positively correlated with

farmer age ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that older farmers possessed broader and deeper indigenous knowledge than younger farmers—a finding with significant implications for knowledge transmission in the context of rural-urban migration among youth.

3.3 Adoption of Sustainable Agricultural Practices

Sustainable agricultural practices examined in the study included soil conservation measures, water management techniques, integrated pest management (IPM), conservation agriculture, and agroforestry. Table 2 presents the adoption rates of these sustainable agricultural practices.

Table 2: Adoption of Sustainable Agricultural Practices Among Smallholder Farmers in Kavango East and Kavango West

Sustainable Practice	Adoption (n=320)	Percentage (%)	Primary Motivation
Soil Conservation (Terraces/Bunds)	156	48.8	Erosion control, soil retention
Water Harvesting/Conservation	142	44.4	Drought adaptation, water security
Conservation Agriculture	89	27.8	Extension promotion, reduced labour
Integrated Pest Management	76	23.8	Pesticide cost reduction, health
Agroforestry/Tree Planting	64	20.0	Fodder, firewood, soil improvement
Composting/Manure Management	138	43.1	Organic matter addition, fertility

Sustainable agricultural practice adoption rates were notably lower than indigenous knowledge prevalence. Soil conservation practices were adopted by less than half of farmers (48.8%), while conservation agriculture and integrated pest management adoption were particularly low (27.8% and 23.8% respectively). This finding suggests that, despite government promotion and extension service support, sustainable agricultural practices have not been widely adopted by smallholder farmers in the Kavango regions.

Key informant interviews revealed important insights about low adoption of certain practices. An extension officer explained the challenges: "We promote conservation agriculture and integrated pest management, but farmers see these practices as labour-intensive and requiring external inputs like improved seeds. Many farmers struggle to adopt these practices because they lack the initial capital and the risk of crop failure is high if they abandon traditional methods they understand." This perspective aligns with findings from Nyahunda and Tirivangasi (2024) [8], who documented barriers to sustainable agriculture adoption including capital constraints, credit access limitations, and perceived risks.

Significantly, analysis revealed that adoption of certain sustainable practices was often motivated by practical necessity rather than environmental consciousness. For instance, soil conservation measures were primarily adopted by farmers experiencing severe erosion or water scarcity, while water harvesting adoption was concentrated in arid portions of the study area. This finding highlights the

importance of targeted promotion of sustainable practices based on local agroecological conditions and farmer circumstances.

3.4 Integration of Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Agricultural Practices

A key component of the study involved assessing the extent to which farmers had integrated indigenous knowledge with sustainable agricultural practices. The study identified three farmer categories: (1) "Traditional only" farmers relying exclusively on indigenous practices ($n=98$, 30.6%), (2) "Sustainable only" farmers practising solely modern sustainable techniques ($n=54$, 16.9%), and (3) "Integrated" farmers combining indigenous knowledge with sustainable practices ($n=168$, 52.5%).

The predominance of integrated farmers (52.5%) suggests that, among the study population, knowledge integration is more common than reliance on either system exclusively. Qualitative data provided insights into how integration occurred. One farmer described his integrated approach: "I use mixed cropping and crop rotation like my grandfather taught me, but I also add compost that I prepare using methods from the extension officer. The compost improves the mix of crops, and the traditional crop rotation helps it work better. The two practices go well together." This statement illustrates how farmers pragmatically combined indigenous and modern approaches to optimise results.

However, integration patterns varied significantly based on farmers' education, age, and access to information. Farmers with more formal education were significantly more likely to be classified as integrated ($\chi^2 = 12.45$, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that education facilitates knowledge integration. Younger farmers showed higher adoption of modern sustainable practices but paradoxically lower integration of indigenous knowledge, indicating a generational shift in farming systems that warrants attention for knowledge preservation.

3.5 Effects of Knowledge Integration on Food Crop Productivity

A central research question examined the relationship between knowledge integration and food crop productivity. The study measured productivity as annual crop yields (tonnes per hectare) for the principal food crops (maize, millet, and sorghum) over the two-year study period.

Table 3: Comparison of Crop Yields Across Farmer Categories (2023-2024 Average)

Farmer Category	N	Average Yield (tonnes/ha)	Range (tonnes/ha)	SD
Traditional Only	98	1.56	0.8-2.3	0.42
Sustainable Only	54	1.89	1.0-2.8	0.51
Integrated	168	2.78	1.5-4.2	0.68
Regional Average	320	2.18	0.8-4.2	0.71

Table 3 presents striking findings regarding the relationship between knowledge integration and productivity. Integrated farmers achieved substantially higher average yields (2.78 tonnes/hectare) compared to both traditional-only farmers (1.56 tonnes/hectare) and sustainable-only farmers (1.89 tonnes/hectare). The difference between integrated and traditional-only farmers was highly significant ($t = 12.34$, $p < 0.001$), representing a 78% yield advantage. Even the difference between integrated and sustainable-only farmers

was statistically significant ($t = 4.21, p < 0.001$), representing a 47% advantage. These findings provide compelling empirical evidence that knowledge integration generates productivity benefits superior to either knowledge system employed in isolation. The results align with theoretical arguments advanced by contemporary development scholars that knowledge integration represents an optimal approach. As Kom, Nicolau and Nenwiini (2024) [6] demonstrated in a South African study context, integrated approaches to indigenous and modern knowledge generated superior outcomes compared to exclusive reliance on either system. The mechanisms underlying these productivity advantages became evident through qualitative analysis. Integrated farmers combined the risk-reduction benefits of indigenous practices (mixed cropping, crop rotation) with the productivity-enhancing effects of modern sustainable practices (improved soil fertility through composting, reduced pest losses through integrated pest management). A farmer articulated this synergy: "The traditional crops together keep pests down naturally, and when I add compost the soil is richer, so everything produces more. The combination is better than either one alone." Analysis of specific integrated practice combinations revealed differential effectiveness. Farmers combining mixed cropping with composting showed the highest yields (average 3.1 tonnes/hectare), while those integrating crop rotation with conservation agriculture achieved 2.9 tonnes/hectare. These combinations appeared to create complementary effects where indigenous ecological knowledge enhanced the effectiveness of modern practices.

3.6 Factors Contributing to High Productivity Among Integrated Farmers

Further analysis identified specific factors associated with high productivity among integrated farmers. Multiple regression analysis was conducted with crop yield as the dependent variable and multiple independent variables including indigenous practice intensity, sustainable practice adoption, farmer education, farm size, labour availability, input access, and extension contact.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Results: Predictors of Crop Yield Among Integrated Farmers (n=168)

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Significance
Indigenous practice intensity	0.156	0.042	3.71	0.001	***
Sustainable practice index	0.203	0.048	4.23	<0.001	***
Farmer education (years)	0.068	0.025	2.72	0.008	**
Farm size (hectares)	0.142	0.035	4.06	<0.001	***
Labour availability	0.089	0.041	2.17	0.032	*
Extension contact (visits/year)	0.121	0.039	3.10	0.002	**
Access to improved inputs	0.167	0.046	3.63	0.001	***

R² = 0.687; Adjusted R² = 0.651; F = 19.28 (p < 0.001)

The regression model explained 68.7% of variance in crop yield among integrated farmers. Access to improved inputs emerged as the strongest single predictor ($\beta = 0.167$), followed by sustainable practice adoption ($\beta = 0.203$) and farm size ($\beta = 0.142$). Indigenous practice intensity also significantly predicted yield ($\beta = 0.156$), confirming that incorporation of indigenous knowledge enhanced productivity. Farmer education and extension contact were also significant positive predictors, suggesting that knowledge and information availability facilitate effective practice implementation. The importance of input access warrants specific discussion. While integrated farmers generally achieved higher yields, those with access to improved seed varieties, fertilisers, and tools achieved significantly higher yields than those without such access. This finding indicates that the effectiveness of knowledge integration is enhanced when combined with access to complementary modern inputs. An extension officer explained: "A farmer with good indigenous knowledge and access to improved seeds will produce much better than one with only indigenous knowledge or only improved seeds. The combination is most powerful."

3.7 Contribution of Specific Indigenous Practices to Productivity

The study examined which specific indigenous practices contributed most significantly to productivity improvements. Table 5 presents correlation coefficients between individual indigenous practices and crop yield.

Table 5: Correlation Between Specific Indigenous Practices and Crop Yield

Indigenous Practice	Correlation (r)	p-value	Significance
Mixed Cropping	0.412	<0.001	***
Crop Rotation	0.356	<0.001	***
Traditional Seed Storage	0.284	0.002	**
Traditional Water Harvesting	0.378	<0.001	***
Indigenous Pest Management	0.301	0.001	**
Organic Soil Fertility Management	0.289	0.002	**
Indigenous Weather Forecasting	0.176	0.031	*
Herbal Pest/Disease Control	0.142	0.087	NS

Mixed cropping showed the strongest correlation with productivity ($r = 0.412$), reflecting its comprehensive benefits for pest management, soil conservation, and risk reduction. Traditional water harvesting ($r = 0.378$) and crop rotation ($r = 0.356$) also showed strong associations with productivity. Interestingly, indigenous weather forecasting showed weaker association ($r = 0.176$), likely because its benefits are realised through its influence on decision-making rather than direct production effects. Qualitative findings elaborated on mechanisms through which these practices enhance productivity. An elderly farmer explained the benefits of mixed cropping: "When you plant maize, beans, and pumpkin together, the maize gives shade to the pumpkin, the beans add nitrogen that the maize needs, and the pumpkin leaves keep the soil cool and moist. Each plant helps the others. This is why mixed cropping is so powerful—it works with nature rather than against it." This explanation demonstrates sophisticated

ecological knowledge embedded in indigenous practices. Similarly, regarding water harvesting, a farmer noted: "In this area with irregular rains, we make small ditches and basins to catch water from heavy rains. Even if it is only one or two good rains in a season, the water in these basins keeps plants alive during the long dry periods. Without these harvesting methods, we would harvest nothing."

3.8 Climate Adaptation Benefits of Knowledge Integration

The study examined how knowledge integration enhanced climate adaptation and resilience. Farmers were asked to reflect on how indigenous knowledge and integrated approaches helped them respond to climate variability and shocks.

Table 6: Farmer Perception of Knowledge Contribution to Climate Adaptation

Adaptation Response	Indigenous Knowledge Support (%)	Sustainable Practice Support (%)	Integrated Approach Support (%)
Weather/Rainfall Prediction	68.4	12.3	78.6
Drought Preparedness	72.1	34.2	85.3
Crop Variety Selection	71.5	28.4	82.1
Pest/Disease Management	54.3	46.7	81.2
Soil/Water Conservation	42.1	71.3	89.4
Seasonal Decision-Making	69.8	19.2	88.1

Indigenous knowledge showed particular strength in weather prediction, drought preparedness, and seasonal decision-making, while sustainable practices excelled in soil and water conservation. Integrated approaches combined these complementary strengths, providing comprehensive climate adaptation support across multiple dimensions. This finding corroborates the argument advanced by Okoronkwo *et al.* (2024) ^[9] that traditional practices remain vital for climate adaptation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

A farmer reflected on how integrated approaches enhanced resilience: "Last year, when the rains came late and were very light, I knew from the signs my grandfather taught me that water would be scarce. So I had prepared extra basins for water harvesting, and I had stored good seeds from previous years. When the rains came, I used the water I had collected to protect my crops. Without this combination of old knowledge and good planning, I would have lost everything."

3.9 Challenges to Knowledge Integration

Despite the demonstrated benefits of knowledge integration, farmers faced multiple challenges in implementing integrated approaches. Table 7 presents the frequency of various challenges reported by farmers.

Table 7: Challenges Affecting Integration of Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Agricultural Practices

Challenge	Frequency (n=320)	Percentage (%)	Severity* (1-5 scale)
Limited Extension Support	267	83.4	4.2
Inadequate Input Access	285	89.1	4.4
Insufficient Credit/Capital	278	86.9	4.3
Youth Out-Migration	234	73.1	3.8
Knowledge Erosion Among Youth	241	75.3	3.9
Market Access Constraints	243	75.9	3.7
Climate Variability	198	61.9	3.5
Land Size Limitations	176	55.0	3.2
Perception That Traditional Methods Are Backward	167	52.2	3.1

Inadequate access to agricultural inputs emerged as the most severe challenge (4.4/5.0), reported by 89.1% of farmers. This limitation constrained farmers' ability to implement integrated approaches requiring inputs like improved seeds, fertilisers, or tools. Extension service limitations (4.2/5.0), reported by 83.4% of farmers, represented the second most severe challenge. Farmers expressed frustration about infrequent extension visits, limited technical support, and extension officers' insufficient knowledge of indigenous systems.

Youth out-migration (73.1%) and knowledge erosion among youth (75.3%) represented critical challenges with implications for long-term sustainability. Focus group discussions revealed intergenerational tensions regarding agricultural knowledge. An elderly farmer expressed concern: "Young people don't want to farm. They see farming as primitive and want to work in towns. The knowledge I have taken my whole life to learn will die with my generation. My children don't want to learn it." This statement reflects a profound challenge to indigenous knowledge transmission systems in the context of contemporary rural-urban migration patterns.

Interestingly, perception that traditional methods are backward was reported by 52.2% of farmers, suggesting that some farmers internalised negative stereotypes about indigenous knowledge promoted by external actors. Extension officers and development workers sometimes discouraged traditional practices despite their demonstrated effectiveness. A community leader observed: "Sometimes the extension officer tells farmers that traditional methods are old-fashioned and they should stop using them. But when we test both methods, the traditional ones often work better. This creates confusion among farmers about what they should do."

3.10 Policy and Institutional Framework for Knowledge Integration

The study examined the policy and institutional context influencing knowledge integration. Interviews with government officials revealed that while Namibia's agricultural policy documents acknowledge the importance of indigenous knowledge, integration of indigenous

knowledge into agricultural extension services remains limited. An agricultural officer explained: "The Ministry has recognised indigenous knowledge in policy documents, but our extension curriculum and extension worker training focus mainly on modern scientific agriculture. We don't have sufficient resources or training to effectively promote knowledge integration."

The study revealed disconnects between policy rhetoric and implementation practice. While the Namibian National Agriculture Policy and the Agricultural Sector Development Programme acknowledge indigenous knowledge's role in sustainable agriculture, extension service curricula, training programmes, and resource allocation continue to favour conventional scientific approaches. This gap between policy and implementation represents a missed opportunity for effectively promoting integrated approaches.

3.11 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Theory and Previous Research

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for contemporary theoretical arguments about knowledge integration. The superior productivity of integrated farmers aligns with theoretical propositions that combined indigenous and scientific knowledge systems generate superior outcomes compared to either system in isolation (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2024) ^[8]. The findings also corroborate the "knowledge pluralism" theoretical framework advanced by scholars arguing that diverse knowledge systems possess complementary strengths and that integration generates synergistic effects (Agrawal, 2002; Nadasen *et al.*, 2016) ^[1,7].

The study's findings regarding specific indigenous practices' effectiveness resonate with documented benefits in international literature. Mixed cropping's productivity benefits align with extensive evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrating that intercropping systems enhance yields, improve soil health, and reduce pest pressure compared to monocultures (Okoronkwo *et al.*, 2024) ^[9]. Water harvesting's importance reflects the critical role of water management in semi-arid environments, documented extensively in African agricultural literature. The strong correlation between crop rotation and productivity supports agroecological theory regarding soil health restoration and pest management through biological diversity.

The study's findings on climate adaptation through indigenous knowledge align with global research demonstrating indigenous peoples' sophisticated climate adaptation mechanisms developed through long-term environmental interaction. Oladele and Amara (2024) ^[10] similarly documented smallholder farmers' use of indigenous indicators for weather prediction, confirming that such knowledge remains practically valuable despite the availability of modern meteorological services.

However, the study extends beyond previous research by providing quantitative evidence on knowledge integration effects. While previous studies have documented indigenous knowledge systems and their climate adaptation contributions, this study provides specific comparative data on productivity differences between integrated and non-integrated approaches. The 78% productivity advantage of integrated farmers over traditional-only farmers and 47% advantage over sustainable-only farmers represents substantial empirical evidence for knowledge integration arguments.

The identification of challenges to knowledge integration, particularly youth out-migration and knowledge erosion among younger generations, aligns with growing scholarly attention to indigenous knowledge conservation in the context of social change and modernisation. Nyahunda and Tirivangasi (2024) ^[8] similarly documented threats to indigenous knowledge systems from educational changes, economic transformation, and cultural change in Southern African contexts.

The study's findings regarding the importance of input access and complementary modern technologies for enhancing knowledge integration outcomes provide nuance to knowledge integration arguments. While purely indigenous approaches achieved lower yields than integrated approaches, integration without access to complementary inputs (improved seeds, tools) also yielded lower benefits. This suggests that optimal outcomes require knowledge integration combined with input access—a finding with important policy implications regarding the need for comprehensive support to farmers, not input provision or extension advice in isolation.

4. Conclusion

This study assessed the effectiveness of integrating indigenous knowledge and sustainable agricultural practices in enhancing food crop productivity in Namibia's Kavango East and Kavango West regions. The research provides compelling empirical evidence that knowledge integration generates substantially superior outcomes compared to reliance on either knowledge system exclusively. Integrated farmers achieved 78% higher crop yields (2.78 tonnes/hectare) compared to traditional-only farmers (1.56 tonnes/hectare) and 47% higher yields than sustainable-only farmers (1.89 tonnes/hectare). Indigenous practices including mixed cropping, crop rotation, and water harvesting remain widely employed and contribute significantly to productivity, while sustainable practices including soil conservation and composting provide complementary benefits.

The integration of these systems creates synergistic productivity gains through combining indigenous risk-management benefits with modern productivity-enhancing techniques. Knowledge integration also strengthens climate adaptation and resilience, providing comprehensive support for weather prediction, drought preparedness, and seasonal decision-making. However, knowledge integration faces significant challenges including inadequate input access, limited extension support, youth out-migration, and knowledge erosion among younger generations. The policy and institutional framework remains insufficiently supportive of knowledge integration despite policy-level recognition. The findings contribute theoretically to knowledge integration scholarship by providing quantitative evidence that combined knowledge systems generate superior outcomes compared to isolated approaches, and practically by demonstrating specific mechanisms through which integration enhances productivity and resilience. For Namibia's food security and agricultural sustainability, the research indicates that strengthening knowledge integration must become a central strategy through: (1) reforming agricultural extension curricula and training to incorporate indigenous knowledge and integration approaches; (2) ensuring extension services provide support for knowledge integration rather than promoting single-system approaches;

(3) enhancing smallholder farmer access to complementary modern inputs and technologies within integrated frameworks; (4) developing targeted programmes to transmit indigenous agricultural knowledge to younger generations; (5) reforming policy implementation to align with policy rhetoric regarding indigenous knowledge's agricultural importance; and (6) establishing mechanisms for farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange and farmer field schools that explicitly promote knowledge integration. These systemic changes would enable smallholder farmers in the Kavango regions and throughout Namibia to harness complementary knowledge systems for enhanced productivity, improved resilience, and sustainable food security.

5. References

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