

# Igba-boi Entrepreneurial Philosophy: An Afrocentric Place-Building Model

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## ABSTRACT

*Through the lens of a place-building model, this theoretical analysis of existing discourse explains the Igba-boi entrepreneurial philosophy and its transformative role in the post-Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) socioeconomic recovery of the Igbo ethnic group. It positions the entrepreneurship model as a strategic resource for capacity development within marginalised communities, ultimately advancing sustainable local economies. Using a qualitative research methodology rooted in a desktop-based literature review, this study draws attention to the core principles of the model's philosophical foundations, emphasising its profound potential as a blueprint for similarly marginalised Indigenous communities. The model's implementation hinges on the community's unified acknowledgement of the importance of development, and the dedication of successful entrepreneurs in identifying, mentoring, and establishing emerging talent. Implementing this entrepreneurial philosophy offers marginalised groups a viable pathway toward economic empowerment, self-sufficiency, and the conservation of cultural heritage. Actors and policymakers can effectively fuse the model's foundations into development frameworks for marginalised communities.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Afrocentric model, Igba-boi entrepreneurship, indigenous people, marginalised communities, sustainable economy.*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** *D4, M21*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

With specific reference to the post-civil war experiences of the Igbo people in Nigeria, this theoretical analysis applies a place-building framework to discuss the significance of the Igba-boi system as a fundamental Afrocentric institution for Indigenous entrepreneurship knowledge revitalisation, nurturing and conservation, as well as local economic development void of external interference. The Igba-boi apprenticeship model defines a system through which young aspiring individuals engage in a mentorship cycle for an extended period to distil real-world entrepreneurial knowledge and experience instrumental in successful venturing (Aleke, 2018), a business principle deeply rooted in Igbo culture.

In this study, we argued that this entrepreneurial philosophical foundation has been resourceful in the Igbo people's journey of recovery and resilience after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970)—a period marked by intense systemic marginalisation, economic exclusion, and hardship, thus, providing a compelling blueprint for marginalised communities, especially in Africa facing similar challenges. A careful application of the model has enabled the Igbo community to overcome barriers and re-establish a sense of identity and autonomy, transforming adversity into a foundation for empowerment and prosperity (Okoro & Iheanachor, 2020). This Igbo resilience and the adaptability of the Igba-boi system reveal how

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African indigenous knowledge systems can function as powerful instruments for community empowerment, economic recovery, and social transformation.

The subsequent section presents the methodology utilised to explore the study. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the Igba-boi entrepreneurial philosophy as a place-building framework, the historical contexts of marginalised Indigenous groups, and their unique traditional entrepreneurial endeavours. It concludes with the research implications based on key findings.

## **2. STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE**

This theoretical study is significant, as it provides a comprehensive analysis of the Igba-boi apprenticeship philosophical foundations as an Afrocentric entrepreneurial model and framework for socioeconomic resilience and community development among the Igbo people. Examining the interplay between marginalisation, the model's philosophical foundations, and practical implementation, the research highlights how Afrocentric Indigenous systems contribute to peace-building and sustainable development.

In addition, it emphasises the significance of cultural identity and collective agency in mitigating systemic challenges which frequently deter progress in grassroots communities, offering valuable insights not only for fostering inclusive economic practices, but also for the preservation of cultural heritage in marginalised communities.

### **2.1 Legal Requirements**

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## **3. METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative research methodology based on desktop synthesis was followed to explore the Igba-boi entrepreneurial philosophical foundations as a catalyst for economic revitalisation and knowledge conservation, further substantiating how lessons drawn from the model can serve as a source of motivation, solidarity, and strategic insight for marginalised Indigenous communities.

The analysis entailed a comprehensive review of academic literature, policy documents, and reports, identifying key themes and patterns associated with Igba-boi philosophy, traditional entrepreneurship orientation, and marginalised Indigenous communities in Africa, triangulating the emerged patterns with the Place-Building Model.

## **4. RESULTS**

The results and discussion embody multiple dimensions, spanning the Igbo as a marginalised ethnic society, the philosophical foundation of the Igba-boi entrepreneurship model, its role in place-building, and its implementation for community development. Each facet is strategically analysed to unpack the model's relevance in fostering socioeconomic resilience, community identity and heritage, and sustainable local development within the context of the Igbo entrepreneurial paradigm.

#### 4.1 Igbo as a Marginalised Ethnic Group

The Igbo community, an Indigenous ethnic group in Nigeria, has historically faced systemic marginalisation, both before and after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) (Nwanegbo-Ben & Ozoigbo, 2021; Oyewunmi et al., 2020). In this context, “marginalisation” manifests as unjust treatment and social exclusion that relegates certain individuals or communities to a peripheral status (Baah et al., 2019), depriving them of access to deserved resources and opportunities. This exclusion frequently arises from entrenched inequalities related to ethnic hegemony, language differences, political dynamics, and regional biases, exacerbating socioeconomic challenges for the affected groups (Matsika et al., 2022).

In the context of the Igbo community, this historical marginalisation and systemic exclusion is based on complex power dynamics within Nigerian society that have long restricted their political representation, cultural expression, and economic participation. The resulting entrenched structural inequalities have intensified hardship and poverty, reinforced cycles of marginalisation, and limited the Igbo’s people influence within the nation. Understanding this pattern of marginalisation is critically imperative in addressing the persistent disparities marginalised people confront and advancing inclusive policies and interventions that promote equitable access to resources and opportunities.

The Nigerian Civil War, also called the Biafran War, erupted between Nigeria and the secessionist Republic of Biafra between 1967 and 1970. This fracas resulted from the nationalist aspirations of the Igbo community, which perceived itself as economically and politically marginalised within the Nigerian federation, particularly under the dominance of the Hausa-Fulani community in the Northern part of the country (Ajayi et al., 2023; Plotnicov, 1971).

Although this war had its roots in pre-existing political, economic, ethnic, cultural, and religious tensions that dated back to Nigeria's pre-independence era (1960–1963), the immediate breakout in 1966 included a series of ethnoreligious violence, anti-Igbo pogroms in Northern Nigeria, military coups, and the persecution of Igbos living in the North part of the country (Daly, 2020). After the war's end, the Igbo people confronted profound hardship, and economic and political marginalisation, struggling to rebuild their fractured structures and socioeconomic fabrics.

To reiterate, the Biafran War resulted in severe consequences for the Igbo community. Beyond the toll on human lives, infrastructural and agricultural damage, and the destruction of local economies have been noted. According to Nkwocha (2010) and Uzokwe (2003), post-war, efforts to rehabilitate the area were further hindered. Some corrupt leaders diverted reconstruction resources intended for the war-affected former Biafran territories, leaving the Igbos to suffer from economic stagnation, widespread poverty, and starvation (Anthony, 2014; Obi-Ani, 2009).

However, amidst these immense challenges, the Igbo people exhibited remarkable resilience born from their entrepreneurial philosophical foundations and solidarity, subsequently harmonising efforts to revitalise their local economy. As earlier mentioned, the Igbo entrepreneurial institutions, specifically the Igba-boi business philosophy, is that which foster communal support in venturing, mainly through skills transfer, guidance, and seed capital, encouraging young individuals to engage in various lucrative business initiatives (Obi-Ani, 2009; Oyewunmi et al., 2020;). The conscious adherence to this philosophy facilitated the intergenerational transfer of Indigenous entrepreneurial knowledge capital and the

conservation of this essential knowledge system through which the Igbo community thrive. It is against this practice that we see the philosophy of communal entrepreneurship deeply ingrained in Igbo society, continuously persisting across generations, and offering vital grounds for empowerment, economic resilience, and cultural resource conservation in the wake of adversity.

#### **4.2 Igba-boi Entrepreneurial Philosophical Foundation**

The Igba-boi model represents an indigenous philosophical framework deeply rooted in Igbo culture, emphasising entrepreneurial development and community empowerment. Central to this framework is the Igbo's enduring "think-home" ideology and an ethos of symbiotic relationships within the community. The Igbo people, an ethnic group hailing from southeastern Nigeria, have a population estimated to exceed 21 million, primarily distributed across five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Within Igbo culture, there is a deeply held belief that individual existence is inextricably linked to the collective humanity of others (Obiagwu, 2021; Ufearoh, 2010).

This philosophy stresses that personal achievements are fundamentally interconnected with collective success. Such a worldview reflects humanity and emphasises the harmony, unity, and power of communal collaboration (Kanu, 2020). The traditions and principles derived from this communal paradigm have persisted through generations, significantly shaping and sustaining various institutions in Igboland, including the Igba-boi entrepreneurial practices.

Igba-boi derives from two words "Igba" and "boi". In Igboland, the precise meaning of Igba varies based on the cultural or conversational context in which it is applied. This is because, in Igbo culture, many words carry different meanings, making the context essential for interpretation. In the current context, Igba means counting or measuring, representing a period of entrepreneurial apprenticeship. Boi in the other instance, was derived from the word boy in the English language, which translates to a young male individual, typically an adolescent, however, serving another.

The Igba-boi therefore, was coined from a system that explains where a young individual is taken under the guidance of an experienced mentor, mainly a successful business owner, who teaches them trade skills with the understanding that they will eventually be set up to start their own business and identify with the productive society (Iwara & Adeola, 2023). To simplify, the Igba-boi structure embodies an arrangement wherein a young, aspiring male individual commits to serving an established entrepreneur for a set period, during which they acquire critical entrepreneurial skills and resources (Aleke, 2018; Kanu, 2020;).

This entrepreneurial orientation functions within the broader Igbo Traditional Business School (I-TBS) framework, an African indigenous institution designed to enhance communal collaborative partnerships to identify and develop talents for the common good. For other Indigenous groups, especially in Africa, confronting pressures of cultural erosion, economic marginalisation, and social exclusion, the Igbo experience, specifically the Igba-boi system, offers an inspiring example of how place-based approaches can promote sustainable local development and resist external pressures that threaten their identity.

#### **4.3 Igba-boi System as a Place-Building Framework**

Through a historical analysis of challenges faced by the Igbo people in the aftermath of the Biafran War, the Igba-boi entrepreneurial philosophy presents a pivotal place-building framework, playing an indispensable role in the community's survival. The concept of place-

building consists of two distinct terms combined to create an interconnected construct, where each component contributes unique meaning while enhancing the overall idea. In a sociological context, the term "place" refers not merely to a geographic locale, but to the web of social relations that connect groups within a specific cultural, economic, and physical environment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

The place is inseparable from the group who inhabit it and serves as a medium that mediates diverse interactions among individuals, social groups, organisations, and broader political structures. The "building" perspective of the framework illustrates the process of identifying tensions and challenges for transformative change, particularly as they emerge through community interactions (Kimball & Thomas, 2012). Interpreted through this lens, the Igba-boi philosophical foundation functions dynamically, shaping the Igbo community's responses to economic adversity by fostering resilience and enabling sustainable local economic growth.

The place-building framework is rooted in the enhancement of a community's various dimensions—its cultural, economic, social, and physical components—while simultaneously striving to foster sustainable, equitable development. Its ideologies empower local stakeholders to engage in collective action and assume control of their immediate circumstances and future (Kimball, 2017). Harnessing local resources and cultivating social capital, the place-building framework promotes collaboration, inclusivity, and sustainable progress, elevating the quality of life, fostering economic advancement, and contributing to overall community well-being.

The Igba-boi entrepreneurial philosophy functions as an essential basis of place-building, deeply rooted in acknowledging a unified community and the collective aspiration for development. Igba-boi fosters a profound sense of place, identity, and pride within the community by synthesising indigenous knowledge, values, and practices into entrepreneurship. In this system, accomplished entrepreneurs act as mentors, transferring knowledge, skills, and venture capital to the younger generation, thus perpetuating the cycle of economic empowerment (Adeola, 2023).

The philosophy constitutes a central cornerstone of the place-building framework, such as collaboration, inclusivity, and sustainability. This community development process begins with entrepreneurial talent identification and nurturing which then transcends to a productive society (Iwara et al., 2019). In the Igba-boi mentorship system, talent identification frequently involves mentees actively seeking mentorship from established entrepreneurs, or mentors snowballing to identify potential candidates within the community. The community in this context includes familiar networks such as religious structures, local villages, extended family, and social groups. The entire sourcing process is heavily influenced by trust, as it relies on personal and family ties that ensure both the mentee and the mentor are committed to fulfilling their roles. Upon selection, mentees receive comprehensive training and resources from their mentors, empowering them to embark on their entrepreneurial journeys.

The Igba-boi apprenticeship structure is anchored entirely on observation and experiential learning, with mentors closely monitoring mentees' actions and behaviours in real-world business settings (Agu & Nwachukwu, 2020; Okoro, 2018;). This informal education unfolds through hands-on participation in physical market activities, with mentors providing guidance, and clarifying learning objectives. Like any other educational institution, the Igba-boi apprenticeship programme is structured into classes, with senior and junior cohorts determined by their year of enrolment and level of maturity in the acquired entrepreneurial

skills. The most senior and competent apprentice serves as a lieutenant of the mentor, frequently assisting the junior counterparts. This arrangement fosters a supportive and collaborative learning environment for the apprentices.

Similarly, the dynamic process of shared experiences nurtures collectivism, creativity, and innovation with apprentices jointly ideating and exchanging perspectives on their entrepreneurial pursuits. These peer interactions build knowledge co-creation, mutual learning benefits, and the creation of essential networks, laying the groundwork for successful venturing in the future.

Prior to the informal education, an agreement is reached between the mentor and the mentee's family, outlining the conditions of the apprenticeship (Iwara et al., 2019). The Igba-boi apprenticeship system emphasises communal bonds, trust, and integrity, frequently relying on verbal agreements anchored in shared cultural values (Kanu, 2020). The Igbo community is distinguished by a deep sense of interconnectedness and an extensive kinship network that nurtures strong communal ties and reinforces a "think-home" mindset. Grounded in sustainability principles, the Igba-boi system fosters values of fairness, peace, justice, and harmony, creating an ethical foundation for both personal and professional interactions (Mpi & Ejo-Orusa, 2019).

Trust permeates business facets within the system, with participants treating each other as family members, reinforcing a commitment to ethical standards, and building long-term, relationship-centred entrepreneurial engagements that extend well beyond mere transactional exchanges. This philosophical foundation highlights the strength of collective action and shared responsibility, where grassroots marginalised community members work together to uplift each other. Fostering a sense of unity, and trust, and prioritising ethical practices, marginalised communities can build supportive ecosystems that not only conserve cultural identity but also foster self-sustenance and resilience against socioeconomic challenges and thrive amidst external obstacles.

The specifics of each apprenticeship vary with mentors, the entrepreneurship typology, and the entrepreneurial skills being developed. This variation informed and determined the outcome of the agreement, especially concerning the training duration. A synthesis from Okoro (2018) and Agu and Nwachukwu (2020) illustrates that a typical apprenticeship in the Igba-boi informal education spans between three, which is the possible minimum, and seven years, allowing substantial time for requisite capacity development.

Although this condition is not entirely binding, frequently, mentors cater to the basic needs of their mentees such as food, shelter, healthcare, and basic miscellaneous. One key reason for this gesture is to mitigate cost-related challenges that might deter mentees from engaging in the lucrative apprenticeship venturing, thus, providing both the rich and vulnerable equal opportunity to benefit from the informal unique entrepreneurial training. Scholars substantiated this standpoint, emphasising that, in some scenarios, mentors accommodate mentees in their residences, against separate accommodations (Aleke, 2018; Iwara et al., 2019). Not dismissing other vital reasons, the Igba-boi capacity development is anchored on strong communal ties and think-home philosophy.

Successful entrepreneurs nurture prospective young individuals with the expectation that they become not only established citizens, but responsible elites for a productive society. This crop frequently reverts to their society to extend a similar gesture, thus, expanding the

apprenticeship network and enriching the circles of successful venturing. As a result, the apprenticeship engagement extends beyond mere skills transfer, requiring close observation and guidance such that mentees inculcate moral principles, ethical conduct, and a think-home mindset.

The completion of training is frequently marked by settlement in the form of startup capital, a business outlet, or equipment necessary for mentees' uptake. According to Iwara (2020), mentors' commitment to support mentees beyond the training phase—by providing seed capital, and step-by-step guidance to navigate complex regulatory environments and bureaucratic challenges—ensures the sustainability and longevity of entrepreneurial ventures within the Igba-boi system.

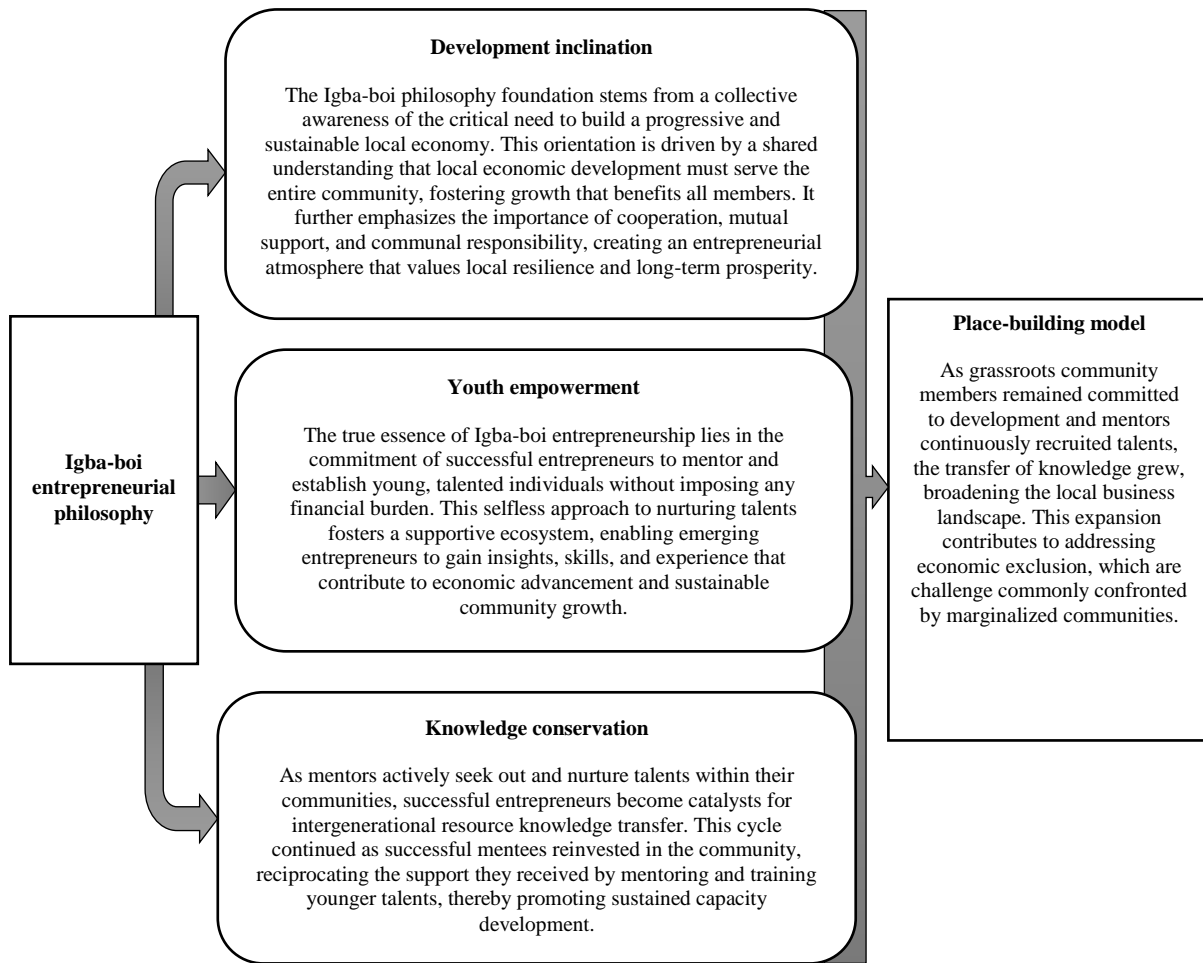
In a nutshell, the Igba-boi apprenticeship system functions as a vital mechanism for identifying, nurturing, capacitating, and conserving talent. As successful entrepreneurs continuously mentor budding entrepreneurs, not only is the indigenous entrepreneurship trait passed on to generations and conserved, but the local entrepreneurial landscape expands, building a productive and resilient society immune from socioeconomic-related exclusion challenges. Empirical discourse shows that the model has a ripple effect on place building, its conscious application extends beyond uplifting the Igbo's collapsed economy post-Biafran war; it is gradually emerging as one of the largest and most effective business incubation platforms globally (Neuwirth, 2017), playing a crucial role in Nigeria's economy by driving local innovation, entrepreneurship development and venturing, job creation, and sustainable livelihood (Orugun & Nafiu, 2014; Mpi, 2019).

This holistic, community-centred entrepreneurship system sustains Igbo business initiatives, amplifying their success and creating a ripple effect of prosperity within the broader community, laying a blueprint for similarly marginalised African Indigenous communities to navigate a path towards integrated and sustainable economic ecosystems.

#### **4.4 Igba-boi Philosophy Implementation**

As illustrated in Fig. 1, effectively implementing the Igba-boi entrepreneurial framework as a place builder departs with a strong community development inclination and an understanding of collectivism. The Igba-boi entrepreneurial foundation is deeply rooted in collectively recognising the importance of building a sustainable and resilient local economy. This is evident in the Igbo ethnic group from where the Igba-boi model derived; the community members worked together in their journey of socioeconomic recovery and resilience after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) (Iwara et al., 2019). The system is driven solely by a set of cultural values that prioritise community welfare and mutual support. At its core are principles of a communal spirit, a strong sense of unity, reciprocity, and the "take-home philosophy"—a commitment to contributing back to the community (Kanu, 2020).

The Igba-boi entrepreneurship model operates in a manner closely aligned with non-profit entities. Nurturing aspiring entrepreneurs at no cost, successful entrepreneurs metamorphose into important agents of transformation, capacitating young individuals who not only join a productive society, but also fall back to contribute to the progress of the community. This approach emphasises that individual success is inseparable from the prosperity of the broader group, encouraging entrepreneurs to venture into entrepreneurial practices that benefit not only themselves, but also their community members. This communal mindset bolsters a cycle of support, where resources, knowledge, and opportunities are collectively shared, creating an entrepreneurial atmosphere that is resilient and resistant to external pressures.



**Figure 1. Fundamental Principles of Igba-boi Entrepreneurship Philosophy**

*Source:* Authors consolidation.

The Igba-boi entrepreneurship institution operates fundamentally as a place-building model, fostering the cohesion of societies and promoting inclusive local economic development. Central to this institution is the think-home philosophy, which stipulates the importance of reciprocity, community unity, and the reinvestment of resources into local contexts. Successful entrepreneurs, serving as stewards of their community, play an essential role in sourcing, nurturing, empowering, and establishing emerging talents, who in return transfer a similar gesture to the younger generation.

This cyclical commitment to entrepreneurial development has led to the continuous enrolment and upscaling of skilled entrepreneurs.

Investing in the potential and skills of young entrepreneurs, marginalised communities, collectively, can cultivate a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem that drives economic and social progress void of external interference.

This ecosystem acts as a stimulus for sustained growth, resilience, and prosperity, creating opportunities that empower community members and catalyse local development. The Igba-boi entrepreneurship system exemplifies how such a system can simultaneously preserve cultural heritage and foster innovation, fostering entrepreneurial growth. Arguably, through this approach, marginalised communities can establish a self-sustaining foundation that supports holistic development and contributes to long-term economic empowerment.



## 5. CONCLUSION

The Igba-boi entrepreneurial philosophy emerged as an essential place-building model for the Igbo in the wake of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). Currently, it has burgeoned significantly as one of the largest informal entrepreneurship incubation systems globally, fostering entrepreneurial capacity building, knowledge conservation, and a sustainable local economy.

This theoretical discourse maintained a standpoint that the model serves as a blueprint for place-building, and careful consideration can invigorate marginalised communities, especially within the African context. Its implementation relies on the collective acknowledgement of the need for community advancement and the active participation of successful entrepreneurs in identifying, nurturing, and empowering promising young talents.

This symbiosis of community involvement and mentorship creates a self-sustaining cycle of entrepreneurial growth and intergeneration conservation of essential knowledge resources.

## 6. RECOMMENDATION

Development actors and policymakers can effectively integrate the model into community development frameworks for marginalised communities, thus promoting sustainable economic growth alongside cultural preservation and social cohesion. This model emphasises mentorship, collective upliftment, and locally rooted entrepreneurship, making it a culturally resonant strategy for advancing Indigenous economic empowerment.

To ensure effectiveness and efficacy, it is crucial to assess the adaptability of grassroots communities and their receptiveness to the model. Such analysis will enhance the customisation of the Igba-boi philosophical foundations to align with grassroots realities, ultimately spurring greater acceptance and participation from local communities.

This tailored approach is critically imperative for addressing the unique obstacles and aspirations of the Indigenous populations, paving the way for long-term success in development interventions.

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