

Chapter Five

African Indigenous Religious Practice and Success in Business

Chapter Objectives:

- To examine the influence of African Indigenous Religious Practices (AIRs) on business ethics, motivation, and success of communities.
- To explore the impact of traditional values like Ubuntu, respect for ancestors and communal responsibility on sustainable business.
- To study the syncretism of indigenous spirituality and contemporary business practices in order to build resilience and social cohesion in the long term.

Introduction

African Traditional Religion (ATR), or African Indigenous Religious Practices, is the spiritual systems that come from the daily lives, customs, and oral traditions of African communities. ATR is not like religions that have written rules. Instead, it is passed down from generation to generation by birth, which affects how people act, how they relate to each other, and their moral values. A Supreme Being and ancestral spirits who act as intermediaries between the divine and the people are at the heart of ATR. These spiritual beliefs promote values like respect, communal responsibility, and ethical behavior. These values are very important in many areas of African life, including business, where ideas like Ubuntu and traditional wisdom still inspire cooperation, resilience, and long-term success.

The influence of African Indigenous religious practices on Business success

African Indigenous Religious Practices (AIRs or African Traditional Religions (ATRs) are religious systems that are based on oral and lived traditions and do not have written doctrines. These belief systems have been transmitted by birth and not by conversion and hence they define the day to day life, relationships, and even bigger social interactions among members of African communities. The main idea behind AIRs is that people are naturally spiritual and ought to behave in a manner that respects others with the knowledge that the opposite of good deeds will have its repercussions by a Creator, the Shona call him *Mwari*, *Nyadenga*, or *Musikavanhu*, as well as the spirits of their ancestors.

The chapter explores the delicate interaction between indigenous spiritual ideologies and business and focuses on the Shona community of Zimbabwe and its surrounding

regions. According to the Shona culture, ancestral spirits serve as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and they are seen as being central to personal and business success. Prudent resource management, hard work, and morality are stressed in proverbs like; *chawawana batisisa, midzimu haipi kaviri* (hold fast to what you have, ancestral spirits will not give twice) and the moral codes are reinforced in this context through prudent wisdom. Ubuntu as a concept of acknowledgment of the interrelatedness of humanity promotes collaboration, social capital, and mutual support, all of which are essential to business success.

The studies highlight the various implications of indigenous spirituality to African businesses. In particular, as presented by Darley and Blankson (2020), the Ghanaian beliefs regarding the social order and the supernatural can both prevent and promote the entrepreneurial behavior, and Igwe et al. (2023) focus on the fact that Igbo spirituality promotes the risk-taking and community-based entrepreneurial behavior. Likewise, Siwale et al. (2023) demonstrate that religious expression and business operation encourages a gradual socio-economic transformation, specifically, in the case of African Christian immigrants.

Even though the native values are largely attributed with the cultivation of the entrepreneurial spirit, the relationship between spirituality and the business performance is complicated. According to the reports of many business people, spiritual beliefs influence their business approach positively, though the role might have been minor. This chapter delves into these dynamics, uncovering the manner in which AIRs inform, motivate and even contradict business activities. The values of collectivism, which are summarized in shona sayings such as, “*chara chimwe hachitswanyi inda*” (one finger cannot crush a lease) and, “*sango rinopa waneta*” (the forest rewards those who are tired) also promote ethical, strong, and sustainable business practices. This exploration gives the chapter more insight on the interaction between spirituality and economic vitality in the African continent.

Impact of African Indigenous Religious on Business Success

African Indigenous religious beliefs have a strong influence on business landscape, as they provide business people with access to physical and non-physical resources. Basic principles of such spiritual systems include respect towards the ancestors, environmental balance, and adherence to the common good. These principles urge the business owners to embark on activities that not only serve their interests but also those of the wider community, an aspect that is highly imprinted in most of the African societies, as they are urged towards the sense of communal responsibility. Spirituality is involved in every decision made by the owners of the African businesses, including the decisions made by the owners regarding their companies. The beliefs develop perseverance and a sense of purpose since they suggest that business could be a

calling or something that was inherited from the ancestors. The prophecies, hints, or visions of the religious leaders are often taken to either motivate or caution on potential business. Certain rituals, like prayers, offerings, and ceremonies, are practiced in order to receive protection and favor. This practice boosts the self-confidence of the business person and his or her readiness to make calculated risks. ATR background is helpful in enabling businesspeople to stay positive amidst the negative in the face of failure and provides mental security.

Indigenous religious beliefs also determine psychological strength. Business people can find comfort in the knowledge that the ancestors of the struggling ones are rewarding hard work and creativity when they are left in difficult situations. The Shona sayings which says, "*ateya mariva murutsva haatye kusviba magaro*" (the one who have put traps in a burned bush does not worry about being dirty) this proverb give courage to those who have already started their businesses. It tells business people that since you have started you no longer need to worry about other minor things which may try to deter you on your business. It encourages people to look forward and hope for the good. The ATR informs people to stay focused to what you want to achieve, no more turning back since they believe that, "*unogona kuputsa chirongo wasvika*" (you can crush the bucket of water while you have arrived). The motivation gives the inner power to push even if things are tough.

Despite the benefits, the integration of African religious beliefs into business remains a debatable issue. The critics point to the possibility that excessive emphasis on tradition may suppress innovation or the advice of the ancestors may not always be applicable to the needs of the modern business. Moreover, others believe that formal business training should be a sure and useful tool as compared to spiritual guidance. However, according to some Indigenous business people, there are some peculiar benefits of integrating spiritual values with modern business, such as moral responsibility, eco-friendly decision-making, and trust within the community, which can allow their businesses to shine in the highly competitive markets. No matter how educated one is there is a need of encouragement and motivation. This motivation comes from institutions such as culture and religious beliefs



Figure 5.1 Prosperity with ancestral wisdom (Davinci, 2026)

Effective business people tend to have a holistic approach to business by integrating business and spiritual practices. Ethical behavior improves the future and present image and is influenced by a sense of spiritual duty to the community and ancestors. The *Ubuntu* philosophy, "I am because we are," supports the connection between the indigenous beliefs and business because it offers the framework of the cooperation and success of everyone together. This mixture of spirituality and practical knowledge facilitates financial prosperity, personal gratification, and social well-being.

Everything said and done, African Indigenous religious beliefs do not simply offer ceremonial assistance to business people, but it also encourages drive, ethical

direction, mental strength, and communal unity. Even though outsiders can doubt the effectiveness or applicability of the practices, the experience of indigenous business people proves their perennial relevance. It can lead to successful and sustainable business when it is based on African Indigenous spirituality and balanced with innovation and tradition, individual success and collective well-being, when paired with the modern business principles.

African indigenous practices Values as a Determinant of business success

The spirit of entrepreneurship that prevails in the continent is entrenched in African indigenous values. These principles are founded on the spiritual beliefs and the communal life, and the deep respect to the people and the environment, which influence the manner of conducting business. Honesty, accountability, mutual support and perseverance are not only embraced as cultural values but serve as pragmatic benchmarks that are used to conduct commercial transactions and long-term relationships. When business people do business in accordance to these principles, they are usual recipients of community trust and that gives them a firm base to grow sustainably.

Proverbs are important in passing down this wisdom, and summing up the experience over generations into easy-to-remember tips on life and business. As an illustration, Shona proverb, “*sango rinopa waneta*”, which translates to the forest rewards those who are tired, explains the importance of persistence and patience something that is vital when it comes to being a business person. Likewise, such adages as, “*Zano ndega akasiya jira mumasese*” (he who avoids advice leaves his blanket in the beer parties) prove the significance of taking advice and working together. These expressions strengthen the collective style in which the pooling of resources, knowledge sharing and helping each other bring about the resilience and new vistas that are not available alone.

The central theme that is within most African societies is the concept of ubuntu that emphasizes the interconnectedness and the sharing of responsibility. This perception of the world promotes partnerships rather than conflicts and acknowledges that individual success can only be adequately achieved when the group is successful. Cooperatives, joint ventures and informal savings groups are models that explain how communal values can be translated into viable business practices and how business people can share risks and rewards by developing relationships of trust and support. The effectiveness of these approaches has been proven in practice by a higher rate of business in Zimbabwean towns.

Ethical business practices are also influenced by respect of elders, ancestors and leaders of the community where the business person normally seeks advice of the tradition before making major decisions. Such consultative practices create accountability, reduce hostility and align business activities with social norms. The indigenous values of Africans and the wisdom inherent in proverbs are a moral compass and useful tool in becoming a business person. Combining these principles, business owners do not only show their respect to their own cultural heritage, but also precondition a long-lasting and sustainable development in the modern fast-paced world.

Embracing Indigenous Wisdom: How Traditional Practices Drive Modern Business Success"

The complex association between cultural maintenance and business prosperity is expressed through studies of Indigenous entrepreneurship. Traditional business metrics are replaced by culturally defined metrics, which demonstrate success to the indigenous businesses, which are collectivist in nature, aim at the contribution of socio-cultural communities, and follow cultural affiliation protocols (Vunibola & Scheyvens, 2023). The necessity of holistic methods of accounting that would equalize financial, ecological, and social impacts is supported by the fact that the commercialization of traditional rituals may reduce the success of the rituals in preserving the environment and destabilize social systems (Aptasari et al., 2024).

Those who effectively exercise Indigenous practices usually have some distinctive advantages in the course of business.



Figure 5.2, Embracing indigenous wisdom (Davinci, 2026)

Through their fusion of traditional knowledge, values, and community networks, these business owners are able to produce products and services that will attract both the local and international customers. By actually accepting their cultural identities, they will be able to build trust in their communities and acquire loyal customers. Through adapting classic knowledge as the guide to moral and sustainable business conduct, the active professionals can also be more prepared to deal with social and environmental problems. Most foreigners visiting a given country are more interested in exploring the way of life of the locals when they are touring the country. They even buy more localized artifacts as compared to the contemporary artifacts. Tourists to Zimbabwe, in particular, are more attracted to the carvings of the locals. To a large number of people, these carvings are their source of income, as they sell them to

tourists in places such as Victoria Falls. Goods manufactured in the area that highlight the customs of Zimbabwe are more attractive to tourists compared to imported ones.

Non-practitioners can adopt a more conventional or mainstream business strategy since they are not much exposed to the practices of the Indigenous. Although this may occasionally simplify operations and enable entry into non-Indigenous marketplaces, such business people might not have the community ties over the long term that are needed to make them successful in the long term. Non-practitioners might struggle to receive local support; they might fail to do so because their businesses will not be differentiated in niche markets without the social capital and cultural resonance of having participated in the practice. It should be noted that cultural involvement can affect the success of the business in various approaches. The combination of the old and new business strategies, according to some studies, can create the best reliable results. Active practitioners who do not lose their cultural identity and have embraced innovation usually exhibit resilience and adaptability, which are the two qualities that are required in the current fast-paced business environment. On the same note, non-practitioners can create bridges and inclusion through active efforts to interact and value the Indigenous values.

The disparity in the successfulness of business with the active practitioners and non-practitioners of African Indigenous practices has a complicated interaction of cultural engagement, community support, and flexibility. Although active involvement is usually associated with the evident advantages in terms of authenticity and group trust, the most successful business executives are those that are able to combine skills in cultural appreciation with modern business savvy. By encouraging respect and cooperation between the two parties, it will be possible to make Indigenous communities reach long-term and inclusive economic growth.

The Relationship between Economic Outcomes and Social Cohesion

The existing research focuses on the interaction of the *Ubuntu* philosophy and business in African contexts and proves that the local values have an impact on business practices and outcomes on the society level. Unlike Western individualistic methods, Hossain et al. (2024) demonstrate the influence of the *Ubuntu* principles on the decision-making process of business people since they prioritize the welfare of employees over simple economic rationality. In a challenge of traditional categorizations of necessity business people, Rees et al. (2024) indicate that *Ubuntu*-oriented business people are motivated by altruistic goals, where they solve unemployment and poverty, not simply out of profit. To back this up, Uduji et al., (2024) use quantitative data provided by the Women Project in Nigeria to demonstrate that the group-based entrepreneurship models of women enhance rural economic development and social

cohesion because of their ability to acquire skills, build social capital, and engage in collective action. They further imply policy suggestions that apply to long-term community-based entrepreneurship.

Africa has a philosophy, *Ubuntu*, which underlines its beliefs: "I am because we are," which has a significant impact on the functioning of business and development of communities. *Ubuntu* also focuses on the unity of interdependence of all individuals, and this concept brings about respect, harmony, and the welfare of the community. Such an attitude prompts businesspeople to focus on community participation, equitable labor policies, and ethics. Besides generating trust, the strategy will help to create good relations with stakeholders and customers, both of which will contribute to the long-term business development.

Ubuntu has impacts on business and development of the community. *Ubuntu* fosters inclusiveness and collective responsibility, thereby motivating business people to start businesses that benefit the underrepresented groups and respond to the local demands. This sense of social duty, which makes the area economically resilient, is usually generated by the businesses that put part of their profits back into healthcare, education, and social programs. Businesses are advantaged by a friendly environment that is constant and conducive as the community also prospers and the cycle of prosperity continues.

The market volatility, financial uncertainty, and stiff competition are some of the inherent challenges of being a business person. Spirituality in such cases can be an important survival strategy for business people. Spiritual people can stay resolute and positive in the wake of adversity since they offer them a purpose and comfort whenever they need such. When business people infuse a sense of purpose and hope, either by prayer, meditation, or group rituals, they can overcome adversity courageously and clearly.

Native spiritual traditions provide a special approach to conquering uncertainty and failure, namely in business. Such traditions may also include consulting their ancestors, communicating with elders, or participating in communal rituals that are aimed at solidarity and strength. These traditions also establish solidarity networks through which business people can make resources and experiences available as well as offer emotional support. This team approach facilitates easier sailing through tough situations, as there is less pressure of risk and making decisions.

Ubuntu and ATR are extremely important factors affecting the relationship between social cohesiveness and economic success. Business people can support the financial prosperity of their business ventures and the welfare of their communities by incorporating the idea of empathy, interconnectedness, and mutual support into their

business models. They are also enabled to take a blow and stand up with a strong thrust with the help of spirituality that relies on cultural practices that evoke hope and unity of purpose. These measures testify to the fact that sustainable economic development and cultural values are compatible.

Indigenous Traditions and Contemporary Business

The field of indigenous business is a general aspect in which contemporary business practices and indigenous knowledge clash. Yang et al. (2023) have developed a typology according to which there are four forms of Indigenous business in Canada and Australia. Such forms of business are distinguished in terms of the presence or absence of the activities in the conventional territories and the presence of the Indigenous signs that can help to rebuild the nation and the community in a way that contributes to economic growth. The entrepreneurial motivations of risk-taking, wealth-seeking, and learning of indigenous peoples that were analyzed by Igwe (2021) in the context of West African tribes are similar to the modern business behaviors. Dharmasiri et al. (2025) divided the 15 forces that affect Indigenous climate-adaptive business in Sri Lankan Veddha communities into five themes: place-based relationships, intergenerational learning, community institutions, collective capacity, and culturally aligned venture strategies placing environmental stewardship over personal gain.

The current globalizing world has placed contemporary business in a dilemma in a fast-changing and global market involving the need to integrate new business models and the need to preserve the native cultures. Most business people living in societies that have great cultural beliefs strive to assimilate these customs with modern tactics to establish an exceptional corporate image. Along with preserving heritage, this adaptation is aimed at using the moral values, solidarity, and trust that are inherent in the traditional values. In the current competitive business landscape, going through these traditions presents both opportunities and challenges to the business start-ups, especially in assessing the measurable business results.

Among other topics of interest is the adaptation of traditional values that are usually based on religious or spiritual beliefs to meet the requirements of the modern business. In most traditions of the indigenous people, resource stewardship, moral behavior, and community welfare are of utmost importance, and these can create a sense of loyalty among the customers and employees alike. These principles are difficult to transform into quantifiable business development, however an example of this is a company that prioritizes the well-being of society over increasing profits and may end up getting a repeat customer but not necessarily a boom of profits. Due to this fact, traditional values play a vital role in developing corporate culture, though in most cases with minimal and indirect effects on measurable success.

The question of why the positive correlation between a successful business and strong religious beliefs is not always evident and measurable is one of the questions. One of the reasons can be attributed to the fact that the values that are based on faith tend to be qualitative and not quantitative. ART has the power to spark such characteristics that are of help in the business career, including resilience, moral conduct, and purpose. These features do not, by the way, necessarily lead to the immediate improvement of financial statements or market share. Indicators such as profitability, growth rate, and market penetration, which are widely used to determine the performance of businesses, might not capture all the soft benefits of religious or conventional practices.

This statistical difference does not mean that traditional or religious values do not influence the success of businesses. Rather, it emphasizes how traditional measures cannot be used to be exhaustive of what it means to succeed in culturally embedded businesses. Indigenous customs can greatly influence the priorities of the business people that may focus on output such as social harmony, intergenerational wealth distribution, or ecological sustainability that cannot be easily seen in the conventional business analytic systems. Hence, the fact that indigenous practices are still present in contemporary business forces us to re-evaluate the concept of business success and its measurement.

The continuity of the indigenous tradition of the present business activity is illustrated by the fact that the traditional values are applied in the modern business environment. The insignificant statistical association between ART religious faith and quantifiable business achievement might seem impossible to explain, yet most of the time; it is an expression of more profound, less quantifiable values. Understanding business with the recognition and respect of this dynamic can result in a more comprehensive view of Business, one that appreciates the profit pursuits as well as the maintenance of cultural identity.

The contribution of African Indigenous belief and Practices to development of business ecosystem

The studies of the ATR show that they are significant in the formation of the business ecosystem due to their numerous cultural systems and body of knowledge. Based on studies comparing Maori and Mapuche entrepreneurship, indigenous entrepreneurial ecosystems develop in parallel with mainstream economic development due to cultural preservation and survival needs. Established ecosystems endorse bigger business models (Mika et al., 2022). The East and West African indigenous knowledge systems offer significant approaches to resource management sustainability that facilitate better scientific approaches (Obiero et al., 2022). The indigenous culture helps develop the business considerably using leadership methods, teamwork traditions, and local skills alongside the local resources and the environment.

The African Indigenous religious practices significantly affect the business ecosystems across the continent, and their origins can be traced back to centuries-old traditions and values shared by the community. These traditions are based on the principles of reciprocity, shared responsibility, and supporting a group. Through the creation of the environments in which teamwork and trust are highly valued, traditional values provide a great base for the resilient communities, which can adapt to the changes and promote economic prosperity. The concept of *nhimbe* (work party) is one of the concepts of teamwork which promote businesses in ATR. The *nhimbe* concept is whereby people are gathered together and help a member of the community to do the works like weeding, harvesting, putting manure in the fields. This is done for free just to show oneness in the community. This makes the businesses of the business people profitable as they get cheap labor to harvest their fields. This develops the business ecosystem by encouraging the young business people to get the free labor.

The young people are also trained in business while they are still young as the shona proverbs says, “*dehwe rinopetwa richirinyoro*” (the skin is folded while it is still wet). This saying is a shona proverb which encourages people to train their children to do different works and businesses while they are still young. This makes the business ecosystem a sustainable venture. The concept of *nhaka* (deceased's estate) is also another form of promoting the ecosystem of businesses where by when a relative is dead his wealth is transferred to someone who will continue with the estate.

Among the most popular traditions of indigenous people, it is possible to mention the notion of *Ubuntu* that assumes the importance of compassion and care towards the group. Unofficial financial institutions such as rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs) have been created due to *Ubuntu* promoting mutual support. In this case, a collection of individuals will opt to save money by giving each other money at the end of the month or a week. An agreement is entered into without a formal contract where one agrees to provide the other with a certain amount of money after a set duration of time. As an example, a group of five people can decide to have four of them pay one of them, say, \$100. Until each one has his/her turn of being given the \$100 by the group. These systems serve the potential owners of businesses, especially where there is a lack of formal banking services. In most cases banks demands lots of collateral for them to lend someone money for their businesses. With these systems, financial inclusion is encouraged, risk reduction is achieved, and more economic activity is generated in the community through the redistribution of resources. Traditional leadership philosophies and decision-making are also known to affect community resilience.

Seniors and local leaders usually assist in conflict resolution and consensus to establish stable grounds for business activities. The chiefs have their own courts which act as a way of promoting harmony within the communities. These courts are lower than the

normal courts of the country but they help in solving minor issues in the community and in businesses. This local government not only ensures the social peace, but it also allows the local government to cooperate in times of external shocks, like a natural disaster or economic decline. Business ventures are thus bound to flourish even in such tough times. An example of a help in times of external shock is where the chief of King have what they call “*Zunde ramambo*” this is where by grains are grown for the sake of saving them under the chief or king’s scheme. Everyone in the community goes to work in the chiefs’ fields. The grains are harvested and stored for times of hardships.

Moreover, the indigenous systems of knowledge contribute to the sustainable resource management and innovation. Examples of such practices include crop rotation, collective tenure of land, and herbal medicine, where the emphasis is placed on balancing economic activity and environmental stewardship. Using the knowledge, the owners of the business will be able to develop culturally and environmentally acceptable products and services, which will attract more market share and lead to stable economic growth.

Practical Questions:

1. What are the effects of the African indigenous religious values such as Ubuntu and respect for ancestors on business ethics and decision making?
2. How does spirituality give psychological support and motivation to African entrepreneurs in their business challenges?
3. How can combining indigenous values with modern business practices enhance sustainability and community development?