Rural Cultural Wealth in African Education: A Nigerian Example

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Abstract

Globally, rural communities are facing varied issues that impact the holistic well-being of residents ranging from the need to increase access to health and educational resources to addressing food and housing insecurities. In this manuscript, we expound upon the rural cultural wealth conceptual framework to demonstrate the application of this conceptual framework globally. Using the Nigerian context, we illustrate how the resourcefulness, ingenuity, familism, and unity found within rural communities can be harnessed to improve rural education.

Keywords: Rural cultural wealth, rural resourcefulness, rural ingenuity, familism, community unity, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Rurality is an integral component of cultural diversity. Yet, rural education frequently exists on the edge of both the policy world and the academy (McShane & Smarick 2018; Schafft, 2016). The marginalization of rural education stifles opportunities for students and diserves nations by not fully harnessing human capital (Schafft, 2016). This phenomenon is international (Sher, 2019; see also, e.g., Alcott et al., 2020; Anlimachie & Avoada, 2020; Annan, 2020; Aslam et al., 2020; Aslam et al., 2020; Belay, 2020; Bosoanca, 2021; Kilpatrick et al., 2019; Landa et al., 2021; Rozelle & Hell, 2020). Globally, rural educational systems face challenges that impact the holistic well-being of students ranging from the need to increase access to health and educational resources to addressing food and housing insecurities. While settings and contexts differ – rural cities, towns, and villages across the globe share key similarities with important contextual parameters found in each place (Godwyll et al., 2014).

To improve rural student effective access to education by drawing upon natural assets and protective factors found within rural areas, we should acknowledge the distinctive sources of knowledge and ways of being in diverse rural communities (Crumb et al., 2023a). In this work, we seek to expound upon the conceptual framework of rural cultural wealth (Crumb et al., 2023b) and translate it to the Nigerian context. This work builds upon interdisciplinary rural education scholarship spanning from early childhood to postsecondary/ tertiary education (Chambers et al., 2019; Crumb et al., 2020; Azano et al., 2021; Hott et al. 2021; Reardon & Leonard, 2018; Seelig, 2021; Williams Grooms, 2015). Here, we provide an appreciative discussion of rurality and discuss the core components of the rural cultural wealth framework - resourcefulness, ingenuity, familism, and unity. We then share examples within the Nigerian context and conclude with an example of how an international school-university-community partnership can amplify local rural community efforts, leveraging rural cultural wealth.

Understanding Rurality

The Oxford Languages dictionary defines rural as “in, relating to, or characteristic of the countryside rather than the town” (¶1). This basic understanding of rurality in the English language undergirds the more than 70 U.S. federal definitions of rurality centering on distance from a city or town and/ or population density (Crumb et al., 2023b). However, this approach is inherently deficit-oriented as it robs rural communities of their ability to self-define except in relation to other communities (Azano & Biddle, 2019; Panos & Seelig, 2019). Rurality encompasses a wide variety of cultures and experiences, including Indigenous, migrant, agricultural, and other communities connected together through intergenerational land transfers (Flora et al., 2018). Rural communities frequently are small, tightly-knit areas with deep links to the land, intergenerational connections among real and fictive kin, and a deep sense of history and tradition. However, as strong as community collective identities may be, many rural areas are divided by characteristics such as wealth, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion, among others. Moreover, minoritized identities are often suppressed (Kebede et al., 2021).
Thus, addressing hegemonic power relations is necessary for ensuring equity in rural schools (Biddle et al., 2019; Pini & Bhopal, 2017). To provide rural students with an equitable and more socially just experience, we advocate for acknowledging the agency and cultural wealth of rural communities, rejecting deficit-oriented perspectives, and strengthening structural support for marginalized rural students and communities (Hewitt & Reitzug, 2015; Myende & Hlalele, 2018). Rural cultural wealth is an asset-based philosophy that centers the strengths of rural communities in rural education inquiry. Rural realities implicate a need for culturally responsive teaching strategies tailored to rural students (Williams & Grooms, 2015) with concomitant appreciation of rural communities, and the care they have for their students and each other. Recognizing rural cultural wealth is an appreciative defense against deficit-oriented perspectives of rurality in furtherance of a more equitable and socially just experience for rural students (Hewitt & Reitzug, 2015; Myende & Hlalele, 2018).

2. Rural Cultural Wealth

The rural cultural wealth conceptual framework is derived from Yosso’s (2005) model of community cultural wealth as situated within a rural habitus within a larger ecological schema (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). See Figure 1. It is asset-based and built upon rural community strength-based constructs. We identify the following constructs as indicators of rural cultural wealth: (a) rural resourcefulness, (b) rural ingenuity, (c) rural familism, and (d) rural community unity. These constructs are grounded in rural community norms and are research and/or evidence-derived through inquiries centered in rural educational contexts.

2.1 Rural Resourcefulness

Rural resourcefulness is the capacity of rural communities and students to overcome socio-contextual obstacles that jeopardize their way of life and general well-being. Rural communities assess situations as they are, not as they would like them to be, and formulate strategies to use the resources at their disposal towards a satisficing outcome. It is a form of self-determination, which is the cornerstone of rural resourcefulness (Mackinnon & Derickson, 2012). In this vein, rural people are themselves important resources given their social, cognitive, and behavioural abilities that are task-oriented, allowing them to control internal emotions and thoughts (Akgun & Ciarrochi, 2003; Mackinnon & Derickson, 2012), and promote natural learning and navigation skills within the community (Mackinnon & Derickson 2012). As described by a participant in Crumb et al. (2019), “They [rural people] have a knack for finding ways to achieve what needs to happen.”

Rural education scholars in the U.S. have studied rural resourcefulness and shown how it can be used to address education resource shortfalls, as well as food and housing insecurity (Howley et al., 2012; Sherman, 2018; Ulug & Horlings 2019), and to acquire physical and mental health resources (Crumb et al., 2019; Grimes et al., 2023). Globally, researchers in Ethiopia (Belay, 2020), South Africa (Landa et al., 2021), Mexico (Padilla-Rodriguez et al., 2021), and the U.S. (Brenner et al., 2021) documented how schools and communities partnered to provide educational instruction, including but not limited to broadband access for online delivery, as well as personal protective equipment, health services, meals, and more during the global coronavirus pandemic. In the middle of a
pandemic, waiting on a centralized bureaucracy was not an option when prioritizing continued instruction (Frankland & Biddle, 2023).

2.2 Rural Ingenuity

Rural ingenuity regards the creative capability of rural peoples to apply common knowledge to complex, dynamic, and everyday activities, utilizing human, social, and physical resources for the benefit of the community (Chambers et al., 2019; Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Noack & Federwisch, 2020). Full-service schools are but one example. In rural contexts, full-service schools draw upon the geographic positioning of the school as a community focal point to provide a base of operations to address a multiplicity of community needs such as food distribution, physical and mental health care, and before- and after-school childcare. Examples of programming like this are found in South Africa (Themane & Thobejane, 2019), the U.S. (Miller et al., 2017), Indonesia (Mudra, 2018), and beyond. Full-service schools are cost-efficient for rural locales as they save money by utilizing their existing infrastructure to distribute resources and services centrally.

By way of another example of rural ingenuity, Santoro and Wilkinson (2016) observed a migrant mother’s acquisition of social and cultural capital to further her child’s educational trajectory. This observation occurred within a larger examination of the adaptiveness of Sudanese refugees to rural Australia. Despite the trauma that brought the family to Australia, this mother cultivated social capital networks and became a community leader, thereby helping her elementary school-aged son make new friends. This led her child to feel emotionally supported and become actively engaged in learning. Thus, through rural ingenuity, migrants can find ways to create fiscal efficiency, foster cultural growth, and enhance community relations. The recognition of these assets is vital to counter toxic migration narratives and provide additional perspectives on how rural people can harness multiple forms of human capital.

2.3 Rural Familism

Rural familism is the creation of intergenerational rural familial lineages who collectively support one another (Chambers et al., 2019; Crumb et al., 2023b). It is defined by a sense of kinship among family members whether they are family by blood relations, marriage, or fictive kin. The latter are incorporated into the family network as part of the family in the absence of biological or marital relations. These kin networks become especially important when necessary governmental services are needed but reach rural communities slowly, if at all. Rural familism helps to integrate individual actions and successes toward a common set of goals. This includes consideration of land and money transfers as well as the use of other assets as common property in service to mutual familial aid. Accordingly, rural familism functions as a social organizer inside kin networks, defining roles, obligations, and actions within nuclear and extended families (Agger et al., 2018).

Rural familism has the advantages of fostering literacy and promoting socioeconomic mobility (McCulloh, 2020), providing protection against persecution and hardship (Campos et al., 2014), as well as emotional support, monetary support, and social standing (McCulloh, 2020). Instead of relying upon the knowledge, skills, and abilities of any one individual, the family network is valued for its resources. Collective family activity is an essential component of daily life and a response to socio-ecological conditions. Familism is especially important for those who experience persistent poverty, do not have equitable access to community resources, or do not receive fair assistance as it may be mitigated by dominant local groups (Sherman, 2006).

As an example, Xuelong and Yongjiu (2019) found that for rural students in China, the notion of family duty, which they referred to as familial capital, spurs students’ academic achievement and successful university admissions testing. These are sources of collective familial pride, not individualistic endeavours, and individual interests are fused with those of the family. Members work for the good of the family and its economic well-being. In such contexts, however, individual desires for postsecondary educational attainment can interject social distance from their families given familial concerns about financial costs which can strain family finances (e.g., tuition, housing, transportation, and income loss), as well as costs to family connections (Agger et al., 2018). Therefore, for college outreach efforts to have lasting success in rural communities, rural familial dynamics must be considered.

2.4 Rural Community Unity

Rural community unity describes coordinating and uniting activities that promote civic participation and enhance rural communities’ capacity for effective organization and cooperation, particularly during times of crisis or pressing need. While not exclusive to rural communities, this type of social action is readily visible in rural communities as communities connect to fill the gaps when governments are unable to provide basic support and services (Shuls, 2018). One example regards an examination of over 3,000 Israeli Jewish citizens over time in the
face of significant crises. The researchers found higher scores of perceived community resilience among rural residents given preparedness, leadership, social trust, collective efficacy, and place attachment (Rapaport et al., 2018).

Rural community unity reinforces the relationships of existing close-knit communities, which is crucial when governmental support is reduced, or bureaucratic procedures become cumbersome. This is not to imply that conflicts common to all groups do not exist in rural areas (Biddle et al., 2019; RedCorn et al., 2022; Sherman, 2006). Groups marginalized by sexual orientation, ethnicity, poverty, indigenousness, and other identities are frequently ignored, excluded, or under pressure to conform to the standards and beliefs of dominant rural community groups (McNamee & Tate, 2022; Whitten, 2023). Individuals outside of kinship networks, such as migrants or those in prison or foster care may need intentional outreach in the face of disasters natural otherwise (Ajilore & Willingham, 2019).

3. Scholar Positionality

Drs. Chambers and Crumb are established rural education scholars in the United States. Dr. Crumb was raised in rural North Carolina and observed how rurality is often approached by academics with a deficit orientation. Yet, as observed appreciatively within their social location, rural communities possess a resilience and desire to thrive, accepted as is and not in relation to some urban other. This is at the heart of the rural cultural wealth concept. By contrast, while Dr. Chambers’ familial roots lie in rural Virginia, she was raised in suburban New York and is now part of the Great Migration in reverse. Because of this positionality between and betwixt rural, urban, and suburban environments, she observes geospatial inequities across contexts and positions her work in advocacy for leveraging community assets for systematic improvement.

Scholar Victor hails from rural Nigeria. He studied in Nigeria, receiving his baccalaureate degree from the Federal University of Technology Owerri, in Southeastern Nigeria, and his master’s degree in geography from East Carolina University. Through his rural resourcefulness, he sought out Dr. Chambers as they attended several campus events which they arrived at independently. Knowing these coincidences marked common interests, they arranged a time to discuss research opportunities. As a cultural geographer, the notion of rural cultural wealth was of interest because rural cultural wealth provides a deeper understanding of the complexities that shape the cultural landscapes of rural Nigeria. As a member of the indigenous Igbo community of Nigeria, he found the rural cultural wealth framework useful in exploring community assets in rural Nigeria because insights from studying rural cultural wealth can inspire innovative solutions grounded in local culture and context.

Scholar Barde is a resident of Jalingo, Nigeria and founder of the Marben Foundation, an organization focused on promoting educational equity for rural and marginalized communities. She has vast experience working in rural communities across Northern and South-Western Nigeria, engaging schools and educational stakeholders.

4. Overview of Rural Nigerian Education

Rural and remote communities across the Southeastern U.S. and Nigeria are distinct environments enriched by their histories and cultures and distinguished by the determination and resilience of their residents. Before British colonization, the majority of modern-day northern and western Nigeria was governed by empires, kingdoms, and chiefdoms. Communities in the north particularly were influenced by Islam and followed Qur’anic educational policies. In the Central and Southeastern regions, people were governed in small chiefdoms and semi-autonomous communities. In the South, educational practices were informed by culture and tradition, focusing on healthy child development both physical and intellectual, respect for elders, character education, vocational training, and belonging within the community (Fafunwa, 2018). In 1842, missionaries arrived on the Southern coast and introduced Christianised educational practices including Biblical instruction and reading in both English and native languages. The missionaries had specific aims to educate future schoolteachers and clergy, while also furthering colonial interests in exploitative agribusiness, teaching agricultural techniques to sustain cash crops (Imam, 2012). In so doing, subsistence farming and family gardens became secondary to cash crops (Dorward, 1987; Korieh, 2010).

In 1914, the British established a colonial government bringing together diverse communities from the southern, eastern, and western regions, while Northern regions remained semi-autonomous given religious differences. By World War II, Qur’anic, traditional, and Western, Christianised education subsisted in the country, North and South. Through liberation, the aim of Nigerian education shifted toward national advancement, focusing on political and socioeconomic dynamics that frame educational policy in Nigeria (Imam, 2012; Fafunwa, 2018).

5. Contemporary Education in Nigeria
Nigeria’s education system is comprised of primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Each level of education is challenged by access to resources, which is compounded by competing national and regional interests as well as corruption concomitant with decolonization (Akanbi & Jekayinfa, 2019; Egbefo, 2012).

**Primary Education.** Primary education in Nigeria is compulsory and lasts for six years. Primary education in Nigeria forms the foundation for further educational attainment and career achievements. The government provides free education at this level, but the system continues to seek resolutions for certain issues such as overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated facilities, and expanded teacher training (Sasu, 2022):

1. **Overcrowded Classrooms:** Overcrowded classrooms are often fueled by high student-to-teacher ratios, particularly in public schools. Overcrowding makes it difficult for teachers to attend to individual students’ needs, thereby hampering education. In addition, it can also create a chaotic learning environment, conducive to effective learning.

2. **Infrastructure:** Many public primary schools in Nigeria need basic facilities such as clean water, sanitary toilets, libraries, and science laboratories. The absence of adequate facilities can hinder learning and negatively impact student health and safety.

3. **Teacher Training:** Quality of teaching is a critical factor for educational outcomes for rural students. Accordingly, increasing opportunities for professional training for teachers in Nigeria’s primary schools is necessary, as some rural dwellers working in schools do not possess the required qualifications. By expanding opportunities for teacher education via in-service professional development or developing strategies for teachers to meet required qualifications through their work, students benefit through improved pedagogical efficacy, particularly rural-centric, place-based approaches that consider the local context.

4. **Funding:** While primary education is officially free in Nigeria, inadequate funding often results in parents having to pay for uniforms, textbooks, and even school facilities, leading to increased student absences and high dropout rates.

**Secondary Education.** Secondary education in Nigeria is divided into Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) and Senior Secondary Schools (SSS), each lasting for three years. JSS is the final component of basic education. The curriculum is broad-based and is designed to be vocational and technical. It aims to expose students to various subjects and career paths to help them identify their areas of interest and skill. In SSS, Students can specialize in a chosen career path. It prepares students for post-secondary education and employment. The curriculum is divided into four main sections: Core subjects, vocational subjects, non-vocational subjects, and trade/entrepreneurship subjects (Fafunwa, 2018).

While JSS is free and compulsory, SSS is not, which significantly limits access and furthers socioeconomic stratification. Education at the secondary level faces similar challenges to the primary sector, with the addition of high dropout rates, particularly among girls (UNICEF, 2013). Challenges in secondary education include:

1. **High Dropout Rates:** Many students, particularly girls, do not complete secondary education. The reasons for this are numerous, including poverty, early marriage, teen pregnancy, cultural practices, and safety concerns. According to a report by UNICEF, only a small proportion of Nigerian girls complete secondary school, with rates being even lower in the northern parts of the country.

2. **Quality of Education:** Similar to primary education, secondary education in Nigeria faces challenges related to the quality of education. Overcrowded classrooms, untrained teachers, and fewer resources can all hinder effective learning.

3. **Transition to Senior Secondary:** Transitioning from JSS to SSS can be a hurdle for many students. Due to the lack of guidance and the cost associated with SSS, many students fail to transition, particularly from low-income families.

4. **Facilities:** Many secondary schools in Nigeria need more infrastructure to support quality education. This includes inadequate classroom spaces, a need for libraries and laboratories, and overall updated facilities.

**Tertiary Education.** The five national aims of Nigerian tertiary education are to advance a society that is:

1. free and democratic;
2. just and egalitarian;
3. united, strong, and independent; that supports
4. a dynamic economy; and provides
5. bright opportunities for all citizens. (Otonko, 2012)

Tertiary education in Nigeria includes universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, both public and private. The sector is characterized by a large student population, with issues such as limited access due to competitive entrance examinations, inadequate funding, and occasional industrial actions by academic and non-academic staff (Okojie, 2009). As surmised by Ogunode et al. (2019), Nigerian tertiary education is challenged by the lack of a sound strategic plan, poor leadership, ineffective teaching and learning, limited research opportunities, problems of inadequate infrastructure facilities, inadequate funding, poor international outlook (staff, students, research), the poor reputation of Nigerian Universities, academic corruption and fraud, low international ranking, lack of modern laboratories. (p. 74)

Reframed appreciatively, there is an opportunity to improve rural tertiary education in Nigeria by investing in local leadership, supporting academic scholarship of benefit to the community, and engaging in school-university-community partnerships to improve facilities (including laboratories), morale, and international esteem.

A strong tertiary education sector is associated with cultivating the human capital to fuel the knowledge economy – people with skills and abilities in the professions, technical skills, management, and leadership to support rural communities and advance the nation forward in a global economy (Otonko, 2012). In this vein, tertiary education contemporarily can be harnessed to respond to the skills gap, the difference between the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed by corporate, government, and non-governmental sectors, and the skills the present workforce holds (Ogunode et al., 2019).

With improved access to tertiary education, rural communities in Nigeria can meet the national goals of a free and democratic, just and egalitarian, strong and independent society. Rural cultural wealth in Nigeria can be harnessed toward this end. International school-community partnerships are but one exemplar.

6. Rural Cultural Wealth in Nigeria

In Nigeria, local communities demonstrate rural cultural wealth as they seek to improve educational attainment, particularly baccalaureate degree attainment, while recentering directives towards traditional educational outcomes: child health (mental and physical); human development, including academic achievement; respect for elders and community belonging; vocational training and credentialing. We provide examples of how the rural cultural wealth dimensions – rural resourcefulness, ingenuity, familism, and community unity – presently are leveraged to improve schools and communities in rural Nigeria. We conclude with a discussion of how international school-university-community partnerships can amplify local efforts for the mutual benefits of the Global North and South.

6.1 Maternal Health (particularly for Young Mothers)

Maternal mortality rates in rural Nigeria are significantly higher in rural communities as compared to urban counterparts. Overall maternal mortality rates are 576 per 100,000 live births. It is the fourth highest rate globally, comprising 10% of maternal deaths internationally (UNICEF, 2022). These deaths are attributed to access to healthcare. According to the Nigerian Minister of Health, while there are Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) planned for each ward in the country, all are not presently operational and all that are operational do not staff midwives (Agency Report, 2022). The establishment of PHCs is slower in rural communities, contributing to rural-urban disproportionality within overall rates. In addition, women in rural Nigeria are less likely to use PHCs, even with universal basic healthcare insurance. Barriers include lack of information, family and individual concerns, preferences for cultural, traditional, and religious forms of care, views on the cost and accessibility of services, and fears regarding the quality of services, among other concerns (Ntoimo et al., 2019). Youth pregnancy with attendant complications is also of concern as often girls are pushed out of secondary education (Alabi et al., 2017). Andersen and Newman (2005) list the following factors influencing access to maternal healthcare: Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, environmental barriers, family resources and general access to healthcare, and the perception of need. The average woman in Nigeria gives birth to five children (Macrotrends, 2023). This means that many Nigerian women have school-aged children and are thus connected to schools, a central community asset in the U.S. (Crumb et al., 2022), Nigeria, and elsewhere around the world. While some perception of the need for maternal care is obvious to the individual, such as through an illness that prompts someone to seek healthcare, the perception of need can be enhanced through general health information provided at schools. School personnel can also prompt women to seek medical care when they perceive signs of potential pregnancy complications (Ntoimo et al., 2019). In addition, school personnel can help families plan to navigate
environmental barriers vocalized by Nigerian women including road conditions, transportation, health facility office hours, and understanding signs of complications. International partners can help by providing print and digital materials to schools as well as by providing basic training offered onsite or via video-conferenced webinars. Such an approach represents rural resourcefulness, building upon the assets of schools.

### 6.2 Apprenticeships

While Nigerian immigrants to the U.S. are lauded for their academic and professional achievements (Sakomoto et al., 2021), as a nation, there are continual challenges to educational attainment rates, and the incomes of everyday Nigerians are moderate (Psacharopoulos, nd). As a matter of policy, primary education is free and compulsory, but just 61% of children ages 6 to 11 consistently attend primary school. Approximately 10.5 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are noted as out of school. Students attending Qur’anic schools in the Northeast (29%) and Northwest (35%) are counted by the government as being out of school. Girls in these regions are especially prone to early departure from primary education (UNICEF, nd). The out-of-school rate is dropping and nationally registers at 25% (UNICEF, 2023). A UNICEF (2023) evaluator found that community-based efforts such as primary education enrollment drives, peer education programming, teacher education and support, direct financial support, and infrastructure grants can help improve primary education indicators.

The rate of students transitioning from primary education to JSS is increasing, with 84% of students doing so. This represents a nearly 20% increase since 2016/17. Only 67% of girls and 69% of boys ascend to SSS (UNICEF, 2023), as SSS is privately funded through tuition and fees. JSS is structured to provide students with a cognitive academic base and pre-vocational skills (Osei, 2016). Vocational education is an outcome of traditional Nigerian education and as such is community valued, and it provides skills that rural communities can use to thrive. As found by Osei (2016), the JSS curricula may be overambitious as it is difficult to merge academic and pre-vocational education at a high level of efficacy. In addition, teachers may not be privy on how to blend academic and pre-vocational preparation. The result is that students leaving JSS are not vocationally prepared upon leaving.

Apprenticeships are a strategy that can be used to bridge the gap between the knowledge, skills, and abilities students have at the culmination of JSS and the vocational skills needed for the global economy. Nwaboi (Henry and Lloyd, 2019) and Ibo (Ukwueze, 2021) apprenticeship models are available and could be a way to draw upon rural ingenuity, to give students opportunities in real-world environments to build skills while making money that can help students and their families. Financial resource constraints are a barrier to apprenticeships in rural Nigeria. International school-university-community partnerships can help as universities work with corporate sponsors (potential investors) and non-governmental grant agencies to build apprenticeship capacity.

### 6.3 Character Education

Familism can be a strength to bond families (Ajayi et al., 2019) as well as a platform to promote character education and gender equity (Ajayi et al., 2019; Mkpa, 2022). Mkpa (2022) advances the notion of Nigerian cultural values and articulates as a set of values that would render improvements in the standard of living, economic productivity, ethnic harmony, security of persons and property, as well as reduced unemployment, particularly among youths, reduced criminality, and reduced poverty, among other aspirations. To do so he centralizes the family in the education of youth, encouraging parents to use personal examples, direct instruction, parables, drawing from African story-telling traditions, morning devotions, positive reinforcement, and collaboration with schools. This latter collaboration he sees as instrumental in distilling “sound cultural values” to prescient minds (Mkpa, p. 166). Finally, he advocates for the vetting of influential others within the family unit. This way, the benefits of familism are not distorted by bad actors, to counter literature on familism as practiced in Nigeria associated with crime (Brown and Akpan, 2020), child-sex work (Oloko, 1993, 2014), and political corruption (Adeoluwa and Adedayo, 2023). International partners can be partners to help facilitate and sustain such work.

### 6.4 School Facilities

Throughout Nigeria, unity is both a national asset and aspiration (see e.g., Asika & Nwangwu, 2021; Atanda & Oliafia, 2022; Augustine & Blessing, 2020; Klein, 2020; Ufuophu-Biri, 2020). One example of community unity in rural Nigeria is how rural communities come together to build and fund their schools (Akinola, 2007; Ndem, 2020). In some rural areas where public education infrastructure is inadequate or non-existent, parents, community leaders, and local philanthropists pool resources to construct classroom buildings and provide basic educational materials. Sometimes, community members might volunteer their time and expertise to teach in these schools. This practice demonstrates the resilience and unity of these rural communities and the value they place on education. Despite facing economic and resource challenges, these communities make significant efforts to ensure
their children can access education. This community-driven approach to education can strongly impact students, inspiring students to contribute back to their communities in the future.

7. Amplifying Rural Cultural Wealth in Nigeria through International School-University-Community Partnerships

Rural-centered international university-school-community partnerships can amplify locally identified issues ranging from limited access to education and healthcare and draw resources to further locally driven efforts (Avent Harris et al., 2019; White & Downey, 2021). There is evidence that international education programs designed through partnerships between rural schools, universities, and communities are evidence-based and successfully tackle issues related to rural education practice (White & Downey, 2021). These programs highlight the benefits of integrating educators and youth from rural areas in service, teaching, and research projects alongside school administrators and community leaders to identify and analyze local issues (Sweeney, 2013). Developing global partnerships among rural schools, universities, and communities leverages the skills and resources of partners from each setting. Collaboratively, they devise novel strategies to enhance educational opportunities and mitigate other inequalities (such as health and finances) among diverse rural populations (Avent Harris et al., 2019; White & Downey, 2021).

Establishing sustainable international school-university-community collaborations in conjunction with social justice advocacy promotes educational and economic advancement as well as the mental and physical well-being of rural peoples (Myende & Hlalele, 2018). Global partnerships are vehicles for leveraging resources. Educators and students who have global literacy can transfer knowledge that promotes holistic well-being across diverse rural contexts. University faculty can serve as connectors and build relationships with various community entities, including religious organizations, schools, and medical service providers (Crumb et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2009) that can allative gross disparities in rural communities. Furthermore, global partnerships are especially helpful in connecting underfunded rural districts and localities to federal, state, and private funding sources. By doing so, universities, students, and communities unify to support rural locales.

One such school-university-partnership is the International Collaborative Action for Rural Education (I-CARE) project which is purposed to cultivate sustainable partnerships with leaders from rural, remote areas across rural regions of the U.S. and Northeastern Nigeria based on a place-based learning model and the rural cultural wealth conceptual framework. We anticipate that through the incorporation of community learning exchanges, global guest lectures, media features, and professional presentations and papers, I-CARE will 1) improve the educational and overall well-being of school-aged youth through increased access to place-based learning approaches centred on rurality, 2) increase family and community involvement to address the educational and healthcare disparities that impact rural youth, 3) increase skills and responsiveness of rural education professionals and community members to better identify and address the needs of rural learners (educational, social, emotional, behavioural), 4) foster collaborative home, school, university and rural community networks that are prepared to improve rural education by leveraging resources, and 5) build sustainable programs in rural schools by supporting community partner’s capacity to implement placed-based learning approaches (see, e.g., COE, 2024).

8. Conclusion

Rural communities in the U.S., Nigeria, and throughout the globe possess resourcefulness, ingenuity, familism, and unity. Through the lens of these cultural dimensions, we observed the potential for rural communities to overcome socioeconomic challenges and resource limitations by utilizing the assets they presently possess. By leveraging rural cultural wealth, the educational outcomes of rural students can be improved.

The value and potential of local efforts should be recognized and supported. International school-university-community partnerships, like I-CARE, can help, as partnership centers and values local efforts while serving as resource conduits to the benefit of all. Such collaborations could bring additional resources, knowledge, and capacities to these communities, helping to amplify and sustain their efforts. These partnerships also offer a reciprocal benefit: while the Global North can provide resources and knowledge, the Global South can contribute insights from the resilience, creativity, and communal spirit of these traditional communities. In an increasingly interconnected world, such mutual learning and exchange can be a powerful tool for fostering sustainable development and educational equity locally and globally.

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