

FOREWORD

AFRICAN IKS FACING THE FUTURE

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The only time that can be influenced is the future.¹ This is obvious since the past has passed and the present does not exist because it is permanently leaving us. But how can we influence the future? It is by building a better future for Africa?

The answer is by simply knowing our roots from the past and observing the present. There is a common perception that when we speak about indigenous knowledge (IK) we are dealing with the past. IK is not in the past, but its roots are. IK is in the present days because it is shared among persons and peoples presently living. Therefore it is a wrong connotation that IK only deals with the past – what is correct to say is that IKS has its roots in the traditions of African peoples, but it is also correct to state that its values, norms, beliefs and practices are alive in the mind of today's people and govern the life of the people in rural, semi-rural and urban areas of the contemporary Africa – it is also correct to say that the achievements of our ancestors are present with us through the institutions they created and respected, like marriage, traditional education, religions and through the legacy in material culture like the architecture in house building – the past or traditions are also present today through aesthetical values that orient our choices and preferences of colours and patterns in the materials, paintings, pots, hair braiding, music, etc. IK is present also in our social identities starting by the names (mostly family names) we are given, to the social and cultural range of choices that we are confronted with in our individual and collective lives.

To demonstrate that the traditions are not located in the past, but in the present, we would and could go on with examples from politics, languages, arts, etc. But the point we want to make is not that – the real issue at stake is to ask ourselves which traditions and which past can and must be mobilized for the future? To what extent can the answers our ancestors gave to yesterday's questions help us to answer today's challenges and also contribute to shape a better future for us? Are some traditional values still functional to the modern African societies?

¹ I am referring, indirectly, to the Mozambican philosopher, Severino Ngoenha, who in his book *From Independences to the Liberties*, develops the idea that the main task of an African Philosophy is to help people to contribute in drawing a better future for themselves and for Africa. He resumes African Philosophy as "mission future". Ngoenha, S. (1992) *Das Independências às Liberdades*, Edições Paulinas, Maputo.

So the fundamental question is how can the knowledge we have about IK be made responsible for the future and in which way can this be transmitted to future generations? The past is not (and should not be) interesting for its own sake, the past is only interesting and important when it has a meaning for today and for tomorrow. By researching or studying IKS we should make no mistake, the mission is the future and not the past that we cannot change. This is why it is extremely important to be very clear about the values that we, as Africans, are fighting for. For example a non-discriminating society, a non-racist, non-ethnocentric, non-sexist and a fair and egalitarian continent. In short a human continent in which the core values are oriented by *ubuntu* (humanness). In our view, it is by having this in mind that we can “go back” to the past, that is, to the traditions and to search for inspiration from the institutions and values that the experiences of our ancestors made available for us today. “How would my father answer to this?” That is, we think, a correct question before we dig into the unknown future! Thereafter we can then ask, “how can this answer help me to build a better future according to the values referred above?”

Research on IKS should play an important, if not the fundamental, role in bringing into the academic world both the traditional (we said it is “present”) and future. The question here would be how to make my research field in IKS responsible for a better future? This question assures the meaning, the sense and the necessary importance of studying and researching IKS in an African context. The challenge IKS should and must pose to the academic world can be viewed in two ways – challenging the contents and also the methods and the correspondent procedures of doing research. In the past nine years of *Indilinga* we received a lot of articles and contributions reflecting IK contents, but we have received very few reflecting on the new methods and the consequent procedures based on IKS or on African values. Reflections started in this direction were unfortunately not followed up with deeper epistemological debate. We recall, for instance the articles: *Using the Afrocentric Method in Researching Indigenous African Culture* by Queeneth Mkabela, *Tell me your Story* by Sølvi Lillejord and Gunn E. Søreide and *Community Based Research and Education in the African Context* by José Castiano (to mention a few) that intended to broaden the discussion in this way. Indeed, the main challenge regarding the development of IKS will be more on the reflection about methodologies and special procedures adopted in researching IKS in African context.

In this issue there are several articles dealing with the future of African IKS. The first article, *What's in a Name? Using Informatic Techniques to Conceptualize the Knowledge of Traditional and Indigenous Communities* by Patrick Ngulube and Omwoyo Bosire Onyancha is concentrated in the definition and the conceptualization of what they call “knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities”. The authors demonstrate that in spite of the recognition of the importance of the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities there is limited agreement on its definition and conceptualization. That is way they start by dealing with definitions attached to this kind of knowledge. For this purpose they use informatics techniques. Their main conclusion is that indigenous knowledge is the label

that is gaining more currency than any other in the social sciences, arts and humanities. For instance, one of the surprising trends is that the terms local knowledge and traditional knowledge are gaining popularity, as opposed to IK, especially post 2004. Another trend of publications they observed is that whereas there was a general decline in the number of titles discussing the three most published terms (i.e. indigenous knowledge, local knowledge and traditional) the titles that contained the term indigenous decreased by a larger margin/percentage than the other two (local and traditional). They present this in numbers. It would be very interesting to follow the trend in the coming years and as well as follow the IKS contents, methodology or epistemological issues published. For instance they concluded that the label or concept indigenous knowledge yielded the highest number of publications (i.e. 2404) followed by local knowledge (1981), traditional knowledge (1916), indigenous knowledge system(s) (421) and traditional ecological knowledge which yielded a total of 419 publications. The rest of the labels produced less than 100 publications. These include traditional wisdom (95), traditional science (88), rural people's knowledge (44), and native knowledge (41). A total of 5 labels yielded between 1 and 30 records each while there was no record that neither discussed issues on defeated knowledge nor marginalized people's knowledge.

This paper reminds us that of one of the major future challenges of IKS, is its interconnection and interface with the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in broader a sense.

The second article by Dani Wadada Nabudere, Marcus Garvey and Andreas Velthuizen confronts us with a "Trans-dimensional Knowledge Management Model". According to the main claim of the authors, the model may serve to manage issues of justice in the African context. Under the title *Restorative Justice and Knowledge Management in Africa: a Multidimensional Approach*, the article demonstrates the applicability of this model to restorative justice in Africa. The main aim of the model is to restore what they claim to be a "lost balance in society", and suggest exploring this method as an alternative to the current legal prosecution. They perceive the model as a direct practical application of the spirit of *ubuntu* for the management of political crisis in African contexts. Although, without further explanation, they also think this method is linked to the Egyptian *Ma'at*. Both *ubuntu* and *Ma'at* share as core values of humaneness, respect, connective justice and reconciliation. It is important to stress that the core principle of the restorative justice is related to the way crime is viewed: it is primarily an offence against human relationships, and secondarily a violation of a law (since laws are written to protect safety and fairness in human relationships).

Recognizing this, the authors further defend that a judicial system or 'restorative justice' on its own will probably not affect the resolution of conflict. It must be combined with efforts "to gather data and process it into tangible knowledge where all the 'higher minds' of society are applied, presents a powerful indigenous knowledge base on which firm decision can be taken on how to effect

national reconciliation, meeting the expectations of the majority of the indigenous society as the highest priority and by addressing the root causes”.

Here we are confronted with a particular and concrete example on how, to use IKS in solving concrete problems on the issue of peace can be handed.

It is never enough to say that education is the main key for the development of our continent. “Educate or perish!” must be the device of development for most African countries. The problem arises when we start to answer the question – what kind of education do we need so that the needs of the African people can be met – especially skills development that the African societies need. The question is more important when we deal with higher education where the “cadres” for the development should be formed. The article *The Curriculum in an African Context* by Berte van Wyk and Philip Higgs discuss this issue with deep philosophical and pedagogical insights. The authors recognise, at the beginning, that “curriculum assumes a critical element in the transformation of education” particularly in the issues of the establishment of what they call an “African identity” in the educational curricula. Their focus is, therefore, “on a reconstruction of the curriculum which aims to give indigenous African knowledge systems their rightful place as equally valid ways of knowing among the array of knowledge systems in the world so as to solve global and local problems more effectively”. Following the statements of the seven pillars of wisdom from Mazrui, that is: (1) tolerance, (2) optimization of the economic well being of the people, (3) social justice, (4) basic gender equality, (5) environment, (6) inter-faith dialogue and cooperation and, finally, (7) a relentless quest for greater wisdom, they claim that with these students will have the intellectual and moral resources they need for the “future” life.

The practical future of indigenous knowledge is to contribute in the eradication of poverty in Africa. Food security is a major issue in poverty eradication programs across the African countries. However, food security “is more than food”, there are nutritional, educational, parental and communal, spiritual and other issues and considerations beyond the quantity of food. The following three articles are based on research on indigenous vegetables and the role they can play in food security.

The article entitled *Health Benefits and Omega-3-Fatty Acid Content of Selected Indigenous Foods in the Limpopo Province, South Africa* by Sefora Mare Makuse and Xikombiso G. Mbhenyane focuses on the nutritional issues of indigenous knowledge. It is based on a study that identified indigenous foods that are believed to have health benefits in the Limpopo Province. An analysis of the omega-3-fatty acid content of the selected identified foods was conducted.

The results of the study revealed that some indigenous green leafy vegetables have a high content of omega-3-fatty acids per fatty acid content and could prevent some diseases like hypertension, diabetes mellitus, constipation, whooping cough, etc. The optimisation of the use of these vegetables in African communities is therefore critical in the fight against hunger and malnutrition.

The second article dealing with food security is written by Nombuso Thandeka, N. Sithole, Joyce M. Thamaga-Chitja and Itai Makanda under the title *The Role of Traditional Leafy Vegetables in Household Food Security in Rural KwaZulu-Natal*. The authors argue that Traditional Leafy Vegetables (TLV) have been consumed by many rural communities for centuries and have a potential to contribute to household food security by providing direct access to readily accessible nutritious food. Their article is based on the study that aimed at identifying and assessing rural households' levels of awareness, consumption and attitude towards TLVs.

The results of the study showed that TLVs were abundant in summer and that the amaranths, blackjack and pumpkin leaves were the most popular. Pumpkins were more popular for food security because they supplied leaves, seed and fruit. There was a general positive attitude towards TLVs and the community did not consider them "poor people food" or toxic, contrary to popular notion. Cooking time and processing of TLVs varied between the respondents, causing some concern over the loss of nutrients. The majority of the respondents consumed TLVs twice a week and the HIV/AIDS infected, and support group, considered TLVs nutritious and good immune boosters. This was attributed to community education programmes conducted by the local healthcare officers. The frequency of TLVs consumption was positively and significantly ($P \leq 0.05$) correlated with the age and education level of the household, which could be attributed to high knowledge accumulated with age and access to information by the educated. However, TLVs were reported to be declining over time, possibly due to changes in customs and land use. The authors argue that local health institutes and other stakeholders should start promoting and strengthening current efforts that encourage the consumption of TLVs as a food-based initiative toward alleviation of micronutrient deficiencies and poverty.

Hlekani V. Mbhatsani, Xikombiso G Mbhenyane and H.M. Sefora, in their article *Knowledge and Consumption of Indigenous Food by Primary School Children in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province* investigated the knowledge, availability and consumption of indigenous foods by primary school children. The results of the study indicated that many children had prior knowledge about indigenous foods particularly fruits and vegetables and that children consumed indigenous foods particularly fruits and vegetables.

The authors argue that there is a need to include knowledge of indigenous foods as part of the school curriculum, because they observed that the children's consumption of indigenous foods improved after their intervention in the schools where they were doing the action research.

Ntombeziningi Shirley Mthethwa and Hellen De Wet documented the ethno-knowledge on the usage of plants which heal wounds and sores. They used the ethno-survey in eighty homesteads, through verbal communication and structured questionnaires. In their article entitled *Medicinal Plants for Healing Sores and Wounds Among the Communities Surrounding uNgoye Forest, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa* they provide the results of their research where they found, among other things, that the most commonly used plant for treating wounds and

sores is *Unasukumbili*. Not surprisingly, is their conclusion that the traditional use of the indigenous medicinal plants has great importance in the primary health care system. They therefore argue that there is a need to put in place conservation measures to ensure the sustainable source of medicinal plants and to encourage the domestication and cultivation of medicinal plants where possible.

The following article by Nombeko Penelope Mpako, Emily Monjoa Matike, Georges Ivo Ekosse and Veronica Epode Ngole provides informative data on the usage of clays by women for aesthetical purposes in several regions of Africa. Their article *Ceremonial Usage of Clays for Body Painting According to Traditional Xhosa Culture*. They used standard laboratory techniques – physico-chemical properties such as colour, particle size distribution, pH and cation exchange to research this common and old African female praxis. Through the ethnographic study they were able to distinguish between various functions and reasons for the practice, as well as present an analytical critique of the uses of clays for body painting and its ceremonial and ritual significance.

Stereotypes Against Women Principals in Rural Communities: an Individual or Cultural Issue? A Synthesis into Indigenous Knowledge Systems by Maria Matshidiso Kanjere, Kgomotlokoa Linda Thaba and LJ Teffo. Their starting point is that socio-cultural stereotypes which tend to undermine women's ability to be leaders and managers cut across the social strata. That is, according to them, discrimination and prejudice with respect to women's ability to lead and to manage is universal. Stereotypes against women that create a hostile environment for the free expression of women's opinions and in public places such as proverbs like *tsa etwa ke ya tshadi pele di wela leopeng* (if a leader is a woman, disaster is bound to happen) are probed. They conclude by stating that "cultural stereotypes and other prejudices against women make it impossible for women to actualize their potential". Thus "women should be advantaged on the basis of their gender".

Luvuyo Ntombana follows what we identified as one of the main challenges for reflection in the field of IKS – to build a solid methodological discourse. As the starting point, he provides his own experience during field research for PhD purposes. The aim of conducting the research was his personal "auto-ethnographic journey"; to explore advantages and disadvantages of that kind of study in IKS. Hence the title *The Rewards and Shortcomings of Auto-Ethnographic Study*. He tries to answer the question, "If someone wants to have more insights on what happens, which mythological considerations are given when the research field is within a community where one is considered as "one of ours?" This makes Ntombana's article imperative to read. The article also gives an historical insight of the discipline Anthropology from European to "African" discourse.

As we move into the next decade of *Indilinga* and getting closer to 2014 (the Millennium Development Goals cut-off date), indigenous knowledge and development, with specific emphasis on poverty eradication, will still take the centre stage in indigenous knowledge systems scholarship. It is not accidental that in

this issue women have written articles about food security as well as reflecting on the experiences about how to assist poverty eradication. Generally women are the preservers of food and managers of food security in households. In the past two issues of *Indilinga* articles on food security, written by women, began to feature strongly.

It is also encouraging to note that more and more articles sent to *Indilinga* were written by young academics (tomorrow's scholars) who are eager to share their own experiences and stories in initiating research in IKS. It indicates that IKS is gaining popularity and is no longer a matter for "elders" only. Gauging from the citations of *Indilinga* by researchers and scholars over the past nine years, *Indilinga* has been a source of information on indigenous knowledge systems as well as the platform to preserve, in a written form, the production of knowledge in IKS. It means, through this journal, scholars have come into contact with a new kind of knowledge and research practice.