Preface

In recent times there has been a growth in the use, acceptance and popularity of Indigenous Knowledge (IK). This has been reflected in the growing literature on the subject since the last century. The high rates of poverty and widening economic divide undermined the mistaken long held belief that western scientific knowledge held the future for developmental programmes in the developing world where most indigenous people live. Consequently, IK is invoked in the agenda of many developing nations as a potential source of sustainable development.

It is essential that attempts to revitalizing IK and reclaiming its place in the sustainable development agenda are informed by sound theoretical perspectives. Scholars, and policy makers are continuously looking for theoretical perspectives to understand research and practice in the field of IK since this knowledge has been in the ascendancy after centuries of suppression and subjugation by various forces motivated by colonialism and post-colonialism. Engaging with theoretical perspectives can change how practitioners and indigenous communities research, understand and manage indigenous contexts.

This book, which has both a theoretical and applied focus, will be useful to a wide range of researchers, academics and students from various disciplines undertaking research in IK. This timely work is important for facilitating an understanding of research in IK in different contexts. The book represents a synthesis of various world-views of IK. Our hope is that the book offers a coherent and accessible exposition of research on theoretical perspectives on indigenous knowledge systems in developing nations. We also hope to provide a book that brings the interests of distinct IK communities irrespective of their discipline. The book is interdisciplinary as it is inclusive of fields such as development, indigenous field methods, biomedicine and philosophy, just to mention a few.

This compilation of research on theoretical perspectives on Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) adds to the literature from the point of view of scholars in developing nations. The book is a scholarly peer-reviewed, edited book. Two scholars reviewed each chapter through a double-blind methodology, plus the editor and some members of the Advisory Editorial Board also reviewed each chapter. Staff at IGI Global also reviewed the content for grammar, writing-style and format.

The book is structured into 20 chapters. The order of chapters is somewhat arbitrary. They can be read in any order. Some chapters may become more relevant in different indigenous contexts than others. Many contributions underscore the need to redefine a new path for humanity based on a holistic and integrated way of knowledge production that makes it possible to interface mainstream “scientific” knowledge with other forms of knowledge. Most of the chapters are an affirmation of the struggle against western epistemological arrogance about indigenous ways of knowing. It is obvious throughout most of the chapters that the indigenous ways of knowing do not support the fragmentation of ways of knowing.
Chapter 1 underscores a need for vigorous and robust research into IKS in general and in Zimbabwe in particular. However, such research is hampered by binarism, a type of affliction that permeates the Zimbabwean academic psyche. The major stumbling block to meaningful research emanates from the effects of western forms of epistemology that have affected some Zimbabwean scholars who have come to believe that all good science comes from the west. What makes the Zimbabwean situation so bad is the fact that the country does not have an IKS policy, but have a science, technology and innovation policy that makes reference to IKS in passing. It is a lack of commitment by government to provide leadership in policy formulation that is aggravating the situation.

Chapter 2 focuses on exploring the contributions of indigenous-oriented relational thinking-and-being and attempts to show that resuscitating IKS is not so much a matter of researchers’ documenting and respecting the content of indigenous knowledge that has been created to date. But research should be directed at drawing out and revitalizing the styles of knowing and living that can be interpreted as characterising indigeneity.

Chapter 3 advances the Fourth World Theory (FWT). It demonstrates that the conceptual framework of FWT is rooted in the dynamic and evolving relationships between people, the land and the cosmos. Authors explain the globally shared four directions metaphor as symbolic of the relational connection of human experience with the land and the cosmos; and how this emblematic instrument blends qualitative, quantitative and relational reasoning to apply knowledge systems that have local, regional and global applications.

Chapter 4 interrogates the use of research frameworks and paradigms that are based on western standards. The chapter shows that heritage of the African indigenous health system has stood the test of time. In so doing it does not negate western research paradigms and methodologies, but asserts an African indigenous health research framework.

Chapter 5 argues for the recognition of indigenous languages as part of the call to decolonize research methodologies. The chapter positions research among indigenous peoples in the context of social justice and human rights, and shows how language fits into the transformation agenda. Drawing from the experience of working with a community in rural KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, the author asserts that the inclusion of indigenous languages in research frameworks contributes to meaningful participation; strengthens collaboration and facilitates the generation of authentic data.

Chapter 6 advocates the use of phenomenological approaches in indigenous research. Although phenomenology is rooted in classical Western research approaches which were notorious for marginalizing IKS, and violating the indigenous peoples’ rights to knowledge, or labeled their views as ignorance or myths, phenomenology has the potential of be applied to indigenous research without marginalising and underestimating indigenous ways of knowing. The researcher using phenomenological approaches may understand how things manifest themselves from the point of view of the participants by suspending the natural attitude and assuming the phenomenological attitude. The phenomenological attitude strips the researchers of any prejudices and pre-conceived ideas when investigating a phenomenon. Given, its ability to research and report on a lived experience from the point of view of the participants who are considered as co-researchers and its flexibility, phenomenology can be applied to indigenous research. It can either be employed on its own or through being triangulated with indigenous research approaches.

Chapter 7 outlines the focus on IKS in South Africa since 1995 and reflects on the challenges related to the particular focus. Specifically, the chapter looks at the challenges related to the recognition of knowledge holders, the ethical issues facing both researchers and knowledge holders, and the protocols
that have been designed and used in South Africa and other places. It concludes by indicating the challenges that still remain and how these can be explored further by the research community.

Chapter 8 examines some of the reasons why Indigenous Knowledge Intelligence (IKI) has been marginalised especially from an Afro-centric point of view and how Africa has lagged behind economically although it is considered to be the cradle of civilization. The chapter provides insights on how IKI leads to development. The chapter also notes that a people which assimilate foreign cultures can no longer hope to continue an independent existence. Indigenous intelligences need further scientific development to realize economic value. IKI must be the focal point of development.

Chapter 9 problematises the concept of IK and demonstrates that even if IK is growing in popularity there is limited agreement on its definition and conceptualization. There are competing ways of defining it and various ways of labeling it. The chapter investigates 17 labels used to refer to the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities and reveals that IK is the label that is gaining more currency than any other in the arts, humanities, and social sciences subject categories.

Using the available literature, Chapter 10 explores the role played by information and communication technology (ICT) tools in the management of IK in the wake of the advent of tools that opened new avenues in the creation, capture, dissemination and preservation of IK. Given the nature of IK, which is commonly exchanged through personal communication and demonstration exemplified as deriving from the master to the apprentice, from the parents to the children, from the one neighbour to the other and so on, ICT tools may provide a strategies of managing it and forestal the possible extinction of IK.

Starting from the premise that much research has been done on IKS at African universities but the results are inaccessible as they remain scattered all over in researchers’ offices, Chapter 11 explores the role that can be played by Institutional Repositories (IRs) in consolidating, preserving, disseminating and facilitating easy access to the information and knowledge to foster Africa’s development. Universities in Africa face a number of challenges in accessing and using IRs. Academics have not fully embraced IR technologies, and librarians struggle to secure content for their IRs. Rigorous awareness campaigns on open access and IRs should be done by librarians to obtain stakeholder buy-in.

Chapter 12 examines the process and effect of codification on IKS. The chapter argues that while knowledge codification is necessary for IKS to be preserved and archived, it is important not to lose sight of the communal ownership of the knowledge systems and to protect them from exploitation and appropriation. The chapter concludes that while the codification of IKS and intellectual property rights are controversial, for IKS to play their full role in socioeconomic development the role of codification that is pervasive in today’s knowledge economy and society cannot be ignored.

Using the extant literature, Chapter 13 demonstrates the need to preserve IK through the preservation of indigenous languages in Zimbabwe. The assumption is premised on linguistic determinism which postulates that language precedes thought and determines one’s worldview. Therefore, by preserving indigenous languages, which in Zimbabwe have continued to be marginalized, the country would be preserving its intangible heritage and maintaining the diversity of its knowledge base. Activities undertaken to preserve indigenous languages are assessed and suggestions put forward on how library and information science professionals could also take part in preserving the knowledge resources.

Chapter 14 presents and reflects on selected local narratives to construct a context. The chapter argues for the ‘contextual’ dimension when looking at IK. The chapter draws on the author’s eighteen years of working with a number of practitioners and knowledge holders whose experience shaped the author’s understanding of the South African IK dialogues, debates, research and studies.
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Chapter 15 outlines paradigmatic tenets and key conceptions underpinning western biomedicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine and Traditional African Medicine. It explores areas of synergy and contradiction, as well as points for potential dialogue between the medical systems. The chapter suggests that if carefully excavated, explorations into such ontologies and epistemologies can make meaningful contributions to knowledge brokerage, thus promoting inclusivity and ethics in knowledge societies. The chapter concludes by making a case for cognitive justice – ‘the right of different traditions of knowledge to co-exist without duress’.

Chapter 16 affirms that the knowledge of indigenous people is also a domain of science. Based on an investigation of the efficacy of indigenous management of influenza using two medicinal plants, namely, wildeals (*artmisia afra*) and wynruit (*ruta graveolens*) the chapter demonstrates that indigenous populations managed ailments, including flu, by using medicinal plants. Using the hybrid methodology approach, the findings confirmed that the two medicinal plants were being effectively used by the community to treat common cold.

The focus of Chapter 17 is on pluralistic tendencies in healing in South Africa. An ethnographic study was conducted among the southern Nguni people of OR Tambo District Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Data was collected using qualitative and ethnographic research methods. The study established that pluralistic tendencies in healing were still rife regardless of the expectation by some Western oriented medical practitioners that people should be using the fast evolving biomedical healing methods.

Chapter 18 posits that the science of psychotherapy is a culturally defined art. Psychological theories must, of necessity and efficacy, be adapted and responsive to the context within which they are practiced. Socio-religious beliefs define the Ghanaian concept of health, ill health, and health-seeking behaviours. Therefore, effective psychotherapy and culturally competent care must be context specific and suited to the needs, norms, practices and beliefs of the people to whom the services are provided. Yet, it is not unusual to find clinicians who practice in one cultural context but were trained in another; a situation that sometimes hinders effective service delivery. The chapter discusses some of the challenges faced by Ghanaian psychotherapists, practicing in Ghana, who were trained in a non-African cultural context.

Chapter 19 documents selected indigenous practices of the Akan tribe of Ghana. Narratives of the selected indigenous practices were obtained through interviews and participant observation. The study found out that indigenous practices of the Akan tribe of Ghana were gradually being lost through oral transmission of cultural practices between generations. The study recommends the documentation of these indigenous practices to promote access, preservation and dissemination of valuable indigenous information for both present generations and generations to come.

Chapter 20 describes the Tiv IK and the factors militating against it and strategies that may be useful in curtailing these problems. Tiv Indigenous Knowledge (TIK) was orally transferred from one generation to another for documentation and continuity. However, the interplay of colonialism, Christianity and intellectual property laws constituted factors militating against the development of this crucial IK.

These chapters give theoretical perspectives of various aspects of indigenous research. Perspectives on various ways of researching indigenous ways of knowing bring another dimension to indigenous research approaches. Consequently, that may promote a robust debate as indigenous research approaches reclaim and (re)occupy their space in the research landscape. The importance of information and communication technologies, institutional repositories, and language as preservers of indigenous knowledge, and the interface between western biomedicine and the indigenous knowledge systems are also put in
the spotlight in the book. That gives indigenous researchers and communities an opportunity to reflect on how these factors have influenced their practices despite the differing contexts. Specific case studies on the loss of Akan indigenous practices and Tiv indigenous knowledge illuminate why indigenous knowledge need to be preserved for posterity and sustainable development in the face of the onslaught from various colonial and postcolonial forces. Some of the contexts are local but they may inform global discourses on IK research and practice.