

# SRHE

*Society for Research  
into Higher Education*

**A determination of how African academics understand and maximise the existing and potential role of Indigenous knowledge and practices within their community-based research: Profiling the ecologically minded university and its contribution to sustainable development**

Research report

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society for Research into Higher Education

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## **Executive Summary**

Higher education in many African countries has been perceived by many as a way to further development goals, specifically by creating a sense of national unity, nurturing collective self-reliance, and reducing social inequalities (Samoff & Carroll, 2004). These developmental ideals espoused in the post-colonial era of the African university became more meaningfully realized in the 1990s and early aughts when connected to national development strategies (Cloete, Bailey, & Maassen, 2011) and university engagement practices (Johnson, 2019). The reciprocal relationship inherent to concepts of community engagement assumes that knowledge flows between both the university and the community, each ostensibly contributing to the development of the other (Moore, 2014, among others). Although not without challenges due to power imbalances, exploitation, and subjugation (Preece, 2013), community cultural knowledge engaged through these partnerships, often connected to notions of Indigenous knowledge (Mawere, 2015), and best understood as reflecting traditional, empirical, and revealed understandings of the world (Dei, 2000).

When engaged authentically, Indigenous knowledge can possibly have a decolonizing effect and contribute to the epistemological diversity of the university (Collins & Mueller, 2016), particularly when co-created via community-based research (CBR) initiatives (McAteer & Wood, 2018). We used a qualitative cross-case study design, based on relational dialogues with academics, university administrators, and community members in Zambia and The Gambia. The findings emphasize the attributes associated with understanding and institutionalizing Indigenous knowledge and the ways in which Indigenous knowledge can contribute to sustainable development through university engagement. Analysis of data has produced many significant findings including the creation of cultures of inquiry, individual academic experiences, perceptions of incongruity, knowledge management, and methodological considerations, among others.

## **Main Report**

### **Overview of Project**

Following a successful application for a member award from the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) to conduct a qualitative study in Africa, there was a necessity to revisit the research plan. We initially planned to recruit participants from Omar Bongo University, Gabon; the University of The Gambia, The Gambia; and Mulungushi University in Zambia. However, after due consideration, the University of Zambia was preferred to the Mulungushi University as it is the oldest and most strategic University in the country and easily accessible due to its location in the capital, Lusaka. Whilst fieldwork in Zambia ran from 1 – 12 April 2019 and The Gambia from 26<sup>th</sup> of August to the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2019 respectively, the one in Gabon could not be held as Omar Bongo University was on strike, with no end in sight. This obviously had implications for our ability to conduct the research in person. As a way of optimising the recruitment of participants for our project, we thought it would be advantageous to work with a collaborator in each university as our first point of contact, who would signpost us through relevant administrative procedures, assist with the recruitment of participants, schedule of interviews and provide interpretation where needed. As an incentive for facilitating the project, we offered to co-author outputs from their respective university and local community. Dr. Ferdinand Chipindi of the Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies was our collaborator at the University of Zambia and Professor Sidat Yaffa, Acting Director of UTG/WASCAL Doctoral Research Program on Climate Change & Education and Dean of School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, was our collaborator in The Gambia.

Fieldwork in Zambia and The Gambia were productive and entailed responsive and relational dialogues (interviews and talking circles), comprising academics engaged in community-based research, their community partners, and university administrators that support the research mission of the institution. Through a mix of purposeful criterion and snowball sampling techniques, we recruited 50 participants in Zambia, comprising 34 university members and 16 community stakeholders. In The Gambia, we had a total of 40 participants, comprising 28 university stakeholders and 12 community members. In total, 90 academics, managers and administrators, and community members participated in our collective case study. Participants gave informed consent and responded to the following overarching research questions:

1. How do academics involved in CBR projects construct the role of Indigenous knowledge within their activities?
2. How does the university act upon knowledge generated from CBR to contribute to sustainable development?

There were many significant findings and outcomes from this project. We would like to develop a symposium at the University of Zambia in order to build upon the creation of an Intangible Cultural Heritage program there, which fits with the national zeitgeist about the role of Indigenous knowledge in education.

### **Cases: Contexts of the Research**

This study focused on two countries not commonly addressed in the African education literature: Zambia and The Gambia. This focus is for two important reasons: 1) The research on African education has been fixated on Commonwealth countries with large, stable education

systems (see Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa) to the impoverishment of our understanding of linguistically diverse and geographically isolated nations; 2) Each countries' development plan addresses sustainable development and the role of education in national growth strategies. The research reported here focused on public universities, because they are often guided by and evaluated on their contribution to development (Ajayi, et al., 1996), are more likely to have academics expected to conduct research (despite limited funding, support, training, and institutional infrastructure to do so) (Iteji & Njuguna, 2014), and possess institutional policies related to the University's contribution towards economy development (Cloete, Bunting & Maasen, 2015). Additionally, each country claims many Indigenous communities and cultures.

## ***Zambia***

Located in Southern Africa and a member of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), Zambia is a country of over 16 million people, claiming diverse ethnicities (Bemba 21%, Tonga 13%, Chewa 7%, Lozi 6%, among others), the majority of which reside in rural areas (60%) (UN Country Analysis, 2015). In 2018, Zambia ranked 143 out of 189 countries assessed by the United Nations' Human Development Index (2019). Zambia is a Lower Middle Income Country (LMIC), whose economy relies heavily on copper mining exports. About 76% of the population participates in the labour market, at roughly even gender rates, with an average of 7 years of schooling, although the country has a high out of school population. Some 47% of students drop out of primary school (UN Country Analysis, 2015). Zambia suffers from climate change, with an increase in temperatures and extreme weather events (UN Country Analysis 2015; 2019) that have implications for management of natural resources and agricultural practices, key aspects of their economy.

### *The University of Zambia*

At independence from Britain in 1964, Zambia faced an acute shortage of human resources with just 100 individuals with an undergraduate degree, and just under 1000 with a secondary school certificate. Thus, the newly independent country was in dire need of human resources to fill the positions of responsibility in the government from the departing British (Chipindi & Vavrus, 2018). To respond to the shortage of skilled manpower, the government embarked on a project to establish a university as a matter of great urgency (Chipindi & Vavrus, 2018). A commission was set up immediately after independence to consider this problem and declared that the new university was to be 'responsive to the real needs of society' (Lockwood Commission, 1963, p. 3). The University of Zambia (UNZA) was thus established in 1966 on a 290 acre-plot approximately 8 kilometres from the central business district of Lusaka, Zambia's capital and the seat of the government. This meant that the institution was to be shaped by the context in which it was situated, namely, the newly independent country. This made the institution permeable to the dominant regional discourses such as liberation and decolonization, specific to the Southern African region, and national discourses such as nation building through human resource development and capacity building in all sectors of the economy.

Given an estimated number of around 30,000 as at the 2018/19 academic year, the student body at UNZA has grown tremendously since the founding of the institution. There is an estimated academic workforce of 802 and 2,000 administrative staff members. The language of instruction is English, although the country itself boasts over 70 languages and dialects.

### ***The Gambia***

Located in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), The Gambia is a densely populated country of 2 million people (176 people per square kilometre), belonging to the Manidaka (34%), the Fula (24%), Wolof (15%), and Jola (10%) ethnic groups, among others, 57% of which live in urban or peri-urban centers (World Bank, 2020). According to the United Nations Human Development Index, The Gambia ranks below most African countries and sits at 174 out of 189 countries in the world in terms of human development (UNDP, 2019). The economy relies heavily on agricultural exports (predominantly peanuts), employing more than 68% of the workforce. The gross national income is \$1400, with almost half of the population living in poverty (UNDP, 2020). Women participate in the labour market at around 50%, while men participate at 67% (UNDP, 2019). The mean years of schooling is 3.7: 30% of women achieve at least a secondary level of education compared to 43.6% of men. The Gambia has experienced changing weather patterns, drier conditions, excessive salinity in the river, coastal erosion, and increased temperatures due to climate change.

### *The University of The Gambia*

The University of The Gambia was established by an Act of the National Assembly of the Gambia in March 1999. The enactment, which was a bold step to fulfil a long-standing desire of the people of The Gambia and to respond to several years of advocacy both within and outside the country for a university, ended years of indecision on the university question and making it a highly politicized institution. The University offers programs which lead to a Bachelor's Degree after four years of study in Humanities and Social Sciences, Economics and Management Science, and Nursing and Public Health; and six years in Medicine and Surgery. In the country's National Development Plan (2018-21), the university has a mission to promote equitable and sustainable socio-economic development of communities through relevant, high-quality gender-sensitive teaching, research and outreach programmes. It has also been mandated to develop its information and communication technologies infrastructure as a driving force for the education of more people more rapidly and for the improvement of the efficiency and academic quality associated with the goals of poverty alleviation and national development. The University of The Gambia and other public tertiary and higher education institutions are mainly government funded with oversight by boards appointed by the Minister of Higher Education based on the provisions of the Acts or Legislation establishing them. The University campus at Faraba Banta is currently being completed and will increase enrolment capacity to about 6,000 students. The language of instruction is English.

### **Methods and Cross-Case Analysis**

The research employed a collaborative, collective, exploratory case study design that captured critical cases intended to eventually produce a theoretically-sensitive cross-case synthesis of findings (Stake, 2013). This process was intended to uncover the instrumentality of Indigenous knowledge systems and strategies at the heart of the study. In our research, we have uncovered a great deal of heterogeneity in *what* Indigenous knowledge *is*; therefore, in the context of this report, Indigenous knowledge is defined and driven by participant examples. Given the units of analysis, the universities and faculty research and engagement with Indigenous knowledge, embedded within a sustainable development paradigm, a cross-case analysis was deemed appropriate in that increased sample size provides a greater confidence of certainty around findings and “support a broader pattern of conclusions” (Yin, 2012, p. 17).

After receiving ethical clearance from each university, fieldwork entailed responsive and relational dialogues (interviews and talking circles) with academics engaged in community-based research, community counterparts and university managers that support the research mission of the institution (Chilisa, 2012). These dialogues were guided by a protocol but were flexible enough to allow for serendipitous moments (Simons, 2009). When constructing our sample, we attempted to be cognizant of gender, specifically that women do not participate equally in higher education and are not represented equally within the academy in either country, and attempted to capture as many women's voices as possible.

Conversations with academics were driven by questions regarding the participants' work with the community, how they understood Indigenous knowledge, how they were able to capture and represent Indigenous voices/practices within their research and findings, and how the university has engaged the knowledge produced by research. We asked participants to connect their work to sustainable development and to identify the partnerships both envisaged and created through CBR that supported the university's role in development.

Managers were asked to describe structures that support the university's engagement with Indigenous knowledge and practices within community-based research and what management mechanisms were in place to foster the process and benefits of Indigenous knowledge and practices to research outcomes. University managers were asked to connect these outcomes to the university's role in development. Fundamentally, the dialogues, as structured, placed the participants' expertise and experience at the centre of the engagement - seeking stories, examples, and context-dependent definitions of concepts - treating 'facts-as-experience' (Simpson, 2008, p. 96). Depending on the nature and depth of the conversation, sessions with managers and academic members were between 30 minutes to 1 hour in length.

Community members who participated in the research were identified by university extension officers as engaged in community-based research projects. Here we employed talking circles to engage participants. "In African contexts and among Indigenous peoples, there are many occasions when people form a circle...and given a chance to speak uninterrupted" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 213). The circle encourages sharing, respect, togetherness, and equality of members (2012). Not dissimilar to focus groups, talking circles replicated the Bantaba found in the Gambia, where men in the community meet in a public place (often around a large tree) to discuss community business. In our methods, however, we were sensitive to gender issues in each country and systematic in creating circles that were gender segregated and representative. Participants were asked about their roles in the community, participation in research, what they have shared about their practices with researchers, and their relationships with researchers. Given that the majority of community participants could not speak English, the data collection process was aided by an interpreter. Interviews and talking circles were recorded and later transcribed.

Table 1. Project participants, total

University	Academics	Managers	Community Members
University of Zambia	22	12	16
University of The Gambia	17	11	12

Data analysis employed coding within and between cases. The first two phases of our analysis strategy used coding to parse the data, taking the data corpus apart in order to make sense of the whole (Stake, 1995). Coding began with structural coding that captured conceptual phrases and participant-driven examples consistent with the research questions (Saldaña, 2016). This first phase of coding focused on defining concepts (Indigenous knowledge, community-based research, sustainability), generating examples, connecting to institutional support frameworks, and understanding participant experiences.

The second phase of analysis entailed pattern coding that grouped the structural codes into a smaller number of categories, effectively reducing the data into analytic units, and identifying emerging explanations of the case (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern codes both organize the data corpus and begin to attribute meaning to the organization (ibid.), well suited for case studies. As the name suggests, pattern coding generated ‘patterns’ in the data segments, or what Stake (1995, p. 78) called ‘correspondences’. Here we highlighted correspondences between codes associated with Indigenous knowledge, CBR, and university engagement and sustainable development. We also noted connections between Indigenous knowledge and decolonization, as well as challenges with incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the structures of the university. Analytic memoing during coding facilitated capturing intersecting concepts in the analysis process and generating propositions about the cases (Saldaña, 2016).

Importantly, we isolated participant stories and examples from the corpus to exemplify the analysis. ‘Stories formed in everyday conversation, which may include those generated in research processes, are directly linked to the experience of organisational members and their desire to account for and make sense of their lives’ (Simpson, 2008, p. 94-95). The third and final phase focused on constructing the cases. Using categorical aggregation, we put the parts of the corpus deconstructed during coding back together to create a whole (Stake, 1995), or rather an interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. In the findings below, we represent the cases in the form of naturalistic generalizations, or verisimilar researcher conclusions about the case (Stake, 1995). We focus on the use of participant stories and other descriptions, as a method of validation of case study research (ibid.), to illustrate aspects of the cases in our work. Below is a description of our major findings based on this analysis.

## Major Findings

### *Indigenous Knowledge in the Academy: Incongruity, Juxtaposition, and Complementarity of Knowledges for Development*

Of particular interest during the research process was how participants defined Indigenous knowledge. Prior to understanding how the university employed Indigenous knowledge, identified through academic driven CBR, for sustainable development, we needed to explore how our participants, at the university, defined and connected to Indigenous knowledge; subsequently



uncovering a great deal of variety. Some participants juxtaposed and disconnected it from ‘Western’ knowledge, while others identified a co-evolution between scientific knowledge and Indigenous knowledge, and many focused on its nature: the context, history, temporality, and dissemination of that knowledge. It was these definitions, notions of complementarity, that were most closely associated with sustainable development.

### ***The Work of Relevance: Teaching Indigeneity in the Classroom***

In both cases, academics often discussed the ways in which they adapted classroom activities and materials to make the curriculum relevant to students and to the needs of their country/community. Many do this by including additional information and activities that allow students to engage with Indigenous knowledge. This may include having class speakers, having students conduct projects in the community, and sharing examples from their research or life experience. This is critical, according to participants, because they are preparing students to contribute to the development of their country and must understand community issues in order to do so. This fundamentally requires a relevant curriculum that complements and contextualizes Mode 1 knowledge sources (Gibbons, 1994). The classroom suffers from colonization through materials (use of Western authors and research) that must be counteracted by the work of an academic and engagement with Indigenous knowledge practices

### ***Sitting with the Elders: African Academic Experiences with Indigenous Knowledge***

Many participants spoke about their personal experiences with Indigenous knowledge as the basis for their community-based research. This theme captures the characteristics of those experiences, which emerged around village life, their previous professions (farming, etc.), and advice from their parents or elders. Participants connected these personal experiences to their research interests, research practices, and how they engage students in learning. This highlights the experiences and connect them to the teaching, research, and service practices of academics for development.

### ***(Un)Subjugating Indigenous Knowledge: Methodological Considerations for Community-Based Research in Africa***

African researchers participating in our project provided a wealth of information on how Indigenous knowledge should be engaged through community-based research (CBR) methods. This theme addresses how CBR connects to the mission of the university, the characteristics associated with good practice in Indigenous communities, the challenges associated with CBR in these contexts, and opportunities to improve Indigenous knowledge dissemination in the community and the academy.

### ***Epistemological Pressures, Knowledge Management, and “Harmonizing” for Sustainable Development in African Higher Education***

Knowledge management processes at universities entail knowledge creation, sharing, and transfer, enabled by human resources, institutional platforms, and incentives (Veer Ramjeawon & Rowley, 2017). Knowledge sharing, in particular, arose as a problem associated with the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge in our case, as participants expressed concerns about the ‘disease of disciplinarity’ and knowledge siloing at the university, a not uncommon problem at African universities (Maponya, 2005). Participants, however, showed awareness of this issue, noting that by ignoring Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge in their work, associated research

outcomes would be impoverished. Acknowledging Indigenous knowledge, at the institutional level, would validate it in the eyes of academics as a legitimate form of knowledge and as a research subject. Increased awareness of Indigenous knowledge among academic researchers led to harmonization between Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge within their methodological approaches to the community. This signalled movement toward a re-centring of Indigenous knowledge at the university and a decolonization of knowledge production: ‘The advantage of this approach to decolonisation is that it recognises and respects other paradigms of knowledge while avoiding the fallacies committed by Eurocentric knowledge systems in silencing, dislocating and marginalising the African knowledge system’ (Ndofirepi & Gwaravanda, 2019, p. 589). When engaged, in this case through harmonization, Indigenous knowledge can have a decolonizing effect and contribute to the epistemological diversity of the university.

### ***Building Cultures of Inquiry: Engaging Indigenous Knowledge for Development in African Higher Education***

As noted, knowledge management issues emerged at each institution. These were compounded by political pressures to conform to Western knowledge dissemination practices and to produce funding for the university. As a result, each university, to varying degrees, struggled with institutionalizing Indigenous knowledge into the curricular and research activities, despite clearly articulated community engagement missions. There were, however, nascent efforts, often buried in disciplinary practices, to build cultures of inquiry around Indigenous knowledge. Here, those efforts will be addressed and important characteristics associated with contextualized cultures of inquiry identified.

### ***Politicizing Epistemologies: Academic Research at a National University in West Africa***

The University of Gambia presented a special case for one particular reason: it had recently undergone a regime change, toppling former president Yahya Jammah, a self-proclaimed traditional healer. This history had contextual implications for the discussion of Indigenous knowledge use at the university - participants were less likely to engage Indigenous knowledge in their practice when compared to UNZA participants. This was compounded by the fact that the university was only recently established by an Act of Parliament and had a funding structure that required the collection of tuition fees to fund itself. As a result, the focus on Western empiricism pervaded. It was seen as successful both in producing publications and in delivering much needed funding. In discussions of Indigenous knowledge engagement, participants at UTG focused on its potential for commercialization, particularly in certain disciplines. This, we believed, warranted a single case finding, in contrast to our collective cases described above.

### ***The Legitimacy of Indigenous Knowledge and Concretizing Institutional Imperatives at the University of Zambia (UNZA)***

While this work sought to understand Indigenous knowledge through a broad lens of community engagement, serendipitously, this research touched on organizational change, because of the recency of the UNESCO ICH project at UNZA. Participants often noted new initiatives at the university that led to changes in their practice and important conversations about knowledge and how that knowledge was generated. To some degree, it seems that external organizations were responsible for these changes, suggesting that this work is also about institutions and organizations, especially how institutions pressure organizations, in a variety of ways, to adopt practices that sustain their legitimacy within the organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Organizations are then responsible for concretizing ambiguous institutional prescriptions

(Edelman, 1992). In this case, the university was responsible for identifying ways to give form to UNESCO's pressure, via funding, to integrate the intangible into organizational practices and policies, thus suggesting that the organization had agency in this process.

This change, though, seemed to come without the associated rule systems and norms accompanying institutional pressure. UNESCO reports on their Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) project page:

“Tertiary education institutions play an important role in training future decision-makers, planners and administrators to work in the field of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and can be key actors in capacity-building. Currently, teaching about intangible cultural heritage is highly dispersed throughout different disciplines (heritage studies, anthropology, environment, etc.) and very few programmes training professionals are focused on intangible cultural heritage safeguarding.”

They note in their survey of Southern Africa, that UNZA's ICH program is the only one in the region (UNESCO, 2019), so little precedent exists for steorage. Additionally, the report shows that while other programs on cultural heritage exist, they are focused on the tangible, or the physical artifacts of a culture, not the intangible like Indigenous knowledge. UNZA is the first of its kind. As a result, there is little in the institutional field to guide the university's change. For those interested in organizational change, this case presents an opportunity to further explore how Indigenous knowledge becomes institutionalized. This, we believed, warranted a single case finding, in contrast to our collective cases findings.

## **Project Outcomes**

### ***Manuscripts***

Thus far we have produced one manuscript from our research, titled “Institutionalizing the Intangible through Research and Engagement: Indigenous Knowledge and Higher Education for Sustainable Development in Zambia.” In it we discuss how universities have an integral role in the development of communities; this is underpinned by the notion that universities possess a social responsibility to be agents of change in relation to society's socio-economic, political, and environmental issues. In Africa, the quest for sustainable development necessarily engages a consideration of the different forms of knowledge available, due to the rich and varied patterns of beliefs, behaviour, and values that permeate the continent and have persisted despite colonialism. In this paper, we assert that there is much to be gained from engaging Indigenous knowledge through scholarship and public responsibility. We unsuccessfully submitted it to a top journal but have made revisions and resubmitted to another highly regarded outlet. We are publishing all work produced from this project in collaboration with co-researchers at each case institution.

We have developed a work plan for the completion of manuscripts based on the findings reported earlier:

1. Johnson, A. T., Mbah, M., Chipindi, F., & Yaffa, S. (in preparation). Indigenous knowledge in the academy: Incongruity, juxtaposition, and complementarity of knowledges for sustainable development.
  - We will publish this article in an Open Access capacity. ● To be submitted in 2020 to *Africa Education Review*.

2. Mbah, M., Johnson, A. T., Chipindi, F., & Yaffa, S. (in preparation). (Un)Subjugating Indigenous knowledge: Methodological considerations for community-based research in Africa.
  - To be submitted in 2020 to *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research & Engagement*
3. Mbah, M., Johnson, A. T., Chipindi, F., & Yaffa, S. (in preparation). Sitting with the elders: African academic experiences with Indigenous knowledge.
  - To be submitted 2021 to the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*
4. Johnson, A. T., Mbah, M., Chipindi, F., & Yaffa, S. (in preparation). The work of relevance: Teaching Indigeneity in the classroom for sustainable development.
  - To be submitted 2021 to *Prospects: Comparative Journal of Curriculum, Learning, and Assessment*

As the discussion of analysis earlier in this report demonstrated, we developed a deep understanding of the data and were able to unearth many important findings. We anticipate publishing extensively from this data set.

### ***Presentations***

We had a presentation accepted to the March 2020 Annual Comparative & International Education Society (CIES) conference in Miami which addressed our collective, exploratory case study that captured critical cases not generally reflected in the literature and intended to eventually produce a theoretically-sensitive cross-case synthesis of findings (Stake, 2013). The presentation reported findings from the University of Zambia (UNZA) and the University of The Gambia (UTG). Importantly, we discovered that through unlearning, cooperating with the community, and closing the gaps between scientific knowledge and Indigenous knowledge, each university reported an important role to play in sustainable development. As one participant stated, “What a young man cannot see even when they stand on the top of the anthill, a grandmother can see while seated.”

We were unable to present in person as the conference was cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis in the United States. This was the same for a paper we submitted to present on the theme “The Relevance of the Intangible: Community Engagement, Indigenous Knowledge Practices, and Sustainable Development at the University of Zambia” at the 6th BESA Annual International Conference on Educational Alternatives: Challenges and Possibilities in Manchester, 25th & 26th June 2020. We submitted a presentation entitled “Epistemological Pressures, Indigenous Knowledge Management, and ‘Harmonizing’ Knowledges for Sustainable Development in African Higher Education” to the 1st Annual Conference on International Higher Education sponsored by the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College in Boston, Massachusetts, 23rd & 24th October 2020.

### ***Special Issue of Journal***

One thing that we have uncovered in our research is how knowledge is dismissed or hoarded within the academy. Participants spoke about how Indigenous knowledge was considered to be “witchcraft” by some, maligned in general, while others noted a pervasive culture of siloing at each institution; as one participant called it: the “disease of disciplinarity.” Furthermore, participants often note how Indigenous knowledge was being lost due to these practices and a persistent focus on traditional academic dissemination practices within the academy (journal publications, etc.). Western publication practices can be observed as a form of knowledge hoarding: high cost of access, produced in English, and centralized in inaccessible formats (i.e., academic journals). While we are expected as scholars to publish the findings of our work, we can make choices that may upend this hoarding, to some extent. A choice reflective of this decentralization can be publication format/outlet, with a focus on open access. So we have chosen to promote a discussion about the universities and their engagement with Indigenous knowledge for sustainable development through an open access journal, the *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* (<https://www.ojed.org/index.php/jcihe/index>), a publication of a preeminent scholarly association, the Comparative & International Education Society, to which we both belong. This choice will enable us to share the outcomes of our work with scholars around the world, particularly those who may not have access to expensive databases and publishers.

The call for proposals for this special issue seeks work that explores how aspects of the university’s mission can engage Indigenous know-how and strategies for sustainable development. We seek to contribute to the understanding of the relevance of Indigenous knowledge systems within the framework of engaged teaching and learning and to what extent the Eurocentric epistemology inherent in modern education can be mitigated for development. We seek work for this special issue that is diverse, exploring Indigenous knowledge in higher education via an array of methodologies, geographies, communities, and theoretical orientations. The special issue has the potential to inform the relationship between participation of higher education institutions in fostering sustainable development, supporting formal engagement with Indigenous knowledge, and bringing to light collaborations between universities and communities to address critical problems faced by societies across the globe. We are currently accepting proposals and are expecting a Summer 2021 publication date.

### *Symposium*

It is worth noting that a few participants at our research sites recalled past experiences of being used merely as research informants and never able to access valuable findings. **In light of this complaint and with the remaining funds, we are seeking the Society’s authorisation to organise a symposium at one of the targeted universities to discuss our findings.** The University of Zambia would be the appropriate site for this work, considering the embryonic Intangible Cultural Heritage program at the institution. In collaboration with the program and our research collaborator there, we seek to develop a symposium to present our findings to participants and community members. Additionally, we will seek presentations from faculty researchers and their community collaborators to present on their CBR methodologies, research, and Indigenous knowledge practices. In collaboration with the program, we will seek high level ministerial participation to further elevate the discourse on Indigenous knowledge in the country. The remaining funds will enable us to achieve this goal.

### **Conclusion**

Universities can promote and maximize the relevance of local Indigenous cultures, strategies, adaptations for sustainable development, as well as mitigate the monofaceted

Eurocentric epistemology inherent in modern education (Dei, 2000; Higgs & Moeketsi, 2012; Barongo-Muweke, 2016; Gorski, 2008). This study has the potential to inform the participation of universities in fostering sustainable development by seeking to support formal engagement with Indigenous knowledge, bringing to light collaborations between universities and communities, through the research of academics, to address critical problems faced by society and generate sustainable solutions. Many authors are re-envisioning higher education in Africa in order to orient universities toward their true developmental potential (Dei, 2014; Mbah, 2016; Preece, 2013; among others). Does this exogenous pressure counteract the subject of decolonization or does it elevate Indigenous knowledge generated through relationships with the community as a possible new institutional arrangement in higher education- or both? The purpose of this report is not to suggest new organizational forms, but viewing universities in Africa through this lens may generate best practices for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and practice into policy associated with teaching, research, and community engagement, and possibly *Africanize* the university, not just the academy.

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