

# African indigenous knowledge systems and relevance of higher education in South Africa

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*The higher education system in Africa and South Africa in particular, is still too academic and distant from the developmental challenges of African local communities. The integration of African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS) into the higher educational system could improve its relevance. This is due to the holistic, community-based nature and approach of AIKS to education and knowledge production. However, this requires an African indigenous theoretical framework of knowledge to guide the integration process. The framework should also clarify the relevance of African indigenous languages in knowledge production and sharing in the era of globalisation. There is also need for a strong institutional support system for a sustainable integration as shown by the experiences of some higher educational institutions in South Africa.*

*Keywords: African indigenous languages, African indigenous knowledge systems, higher education, local communities, relevance.*

The interrogation on the role of African indigenous knowledge systems in promoting the relevance of higher education in South Africa and Africa at large is based on the argument that although the use of what is considered to be indigenous knowledge in Africa goes back to the history of humankind in the continent, its current promotion in education and other spheres of community livelihood and development is a recent phenomenon. It has gained conceptual significance as a subject of discussion in the last past two decade or so (Horschemke, 2004). In the context of higher educational transformation inherited from colonialism as the focus of this discussion, there are certain questions which need to be critically examined, i.e. what does indigenous knowledge as a concept mean? What are its objectives with regard to making higher education in South Africa and Africa in general relevant?

These questions arise to due to a number of considerations. First, there has been various definitions of the concept “indigenous knowledge” as applied to a variety livelihood situations in Africa such as i.e. food security, environment conservation, health, natural resource management, conflict transformation, education, governance and leadership, etc. However, in the context of promoting African indigenous knowledge systems for sustainable livelihood, it has generally been propagated to incorporate non-western beliefs, practices, customs, worldviews, including informal forms of education. For instance, in the works of scholars such as Odora-Hoppers (2001 and 2002), Semali & Kincheloe (1999), Cresswell (1998), and Hountondji (1995), it has been contrasted with global dominant western knowledge systems produced in research and academic institutions.

However, levelled against this conceptualisation of what constitutes African indigenous knowledge is that although much has been propagated about the indignity of the diverse African practices, there has been limited effort among the various African scholars to provide their own clear understanding of the concept “knowledge” based on Africa’s own history of ideas and intellectual development. This could provide a strong African indigenous theoretical framework and guidance for the development of methodologies of incorporating African ways of knowing and knowledge production into the post-colonial education system, especially higher education as the focus of the discussion. It is on the basis of this consideration that the following section discusses in detail the status of African Indigenous knowledge in existing literature.

### **AFRICAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN THE EXISTING CRITICAL LITERATURE**

As a response to the western view that the promoters of African indigenous knowledge have not been able to provide a clear definition and conceptualisation of their own as to what constitutes “knowledge”, a number of scholars such as Lander (2000) and Chavunduka (1995) have argued that western worldview of “knowledge” has since its introduction in Africa and other non-western societies, lacked an understanding of the holistic nature and approach of non-western ways of knowing and knowledge production. Nkondo (2012) argues that the western perception of African indigenous knowledge as mere repetition of practices without any theory to explain them is a depiction of western cultural and intellectual arrogance. In the perception of African scholars, a traditional healer who is able to cure a particular disease using specific herbs has the knowledge and theory of the plant species and their characteristics. Mazrui (1978) elaborates further the limited western conceptualisation of scholarship and education that stresses that to be scholarly and scientific implies being free from external interference, especially community engagement and political demands.

The separation of theory from practice as emphasised in western education and scholarship, was also criticised by the late former President of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (1967) when he was questioning the role of higher education in a developing country such as Tanzania, characterised by poverty and inequality. His

concern was whether such a country can afford pure academics who put emphasis on theoretical knowledge at the expense of community engagement. This approach to scholarship and higher education in Africa has been criticised for making higher education in the continent too distant from community concerns and production of graduates who tend to be inadequately sensitive to the developmental challenges of their local communities and country (Muya, 2007).

This is demonstrated by the fact that despite decades of self-rule, African scholars have not succeeded in empowering the continent to develop its own educational theoretical and methodological framework for knowledge production and sustainable development. There could be several reasons for this but the paper argues that one of the key factors is that education, especially higher education, in Africa has not been relevant to the needs and concerns of African societies. This is in spite of the substantial resources expended to boost higher education in Africa and South Africa. Evidence provided by the South African National Treasury (2012) shows that about 6% of national budget goes to Higher Education and Training.

The basic problem is that educational structures inherited from colonialism are based on cultural values different from those existing in most of the African indigenous societies. The lack of relevance is perpetuated by the continued social, economic and technological ties between African countries and their former colonising powers. Higher education in Africa is one of the main tools used to foster this bond, rather than reduce it. Reforms in African education are still conceived and implemented within the framework of this relationship, by marginalising the integration of African cultural values and indigenous languages into the education system at all levels (Smith, 2002; Walter, 2002).

This perverse situation is compounded by the fact that links between African institutions themselves are largely neglected in favour of partnerships with the western countries. Currently, there are more research and academic linkages between African and western institutions than among African institutions themselves. Hountondji (2002) & Hountondji (1995) add that another salient feature of extraversion in Africa is that most academic and research activities are still carried out in colonial languages, especially English, French and Portuguese, thus undermining the development of research and theory based on indigenous conceptual framework and paradigms. The colonial and apartheid education and research in Africa, and South Africa in particular, did not invest in the development of indigenous African theory building and interpretation of society, as the heart of the scientific process. This is due to the fact that the education provided in African academic and research institutions was not meant to address the intellectual and research needs of the African people. The intellectual and research activities in these institutions of higher learning are still designed to support the economic exploitation of natural resources `including justification of the theoretical assumptions of western institutions and scholarship about the primitive nature of Africa (McCarthy, 2004; Moodie, 2003).

However, in spite of the extraversion and disarticulation of African indigenous knowledge systems, there is still great potentiality in the continent for promotion of African indigenous knowledge systems for sustainable community livelihood and development. The unfortunate history of the continent (slavery, colonisation and Apartheid) has not completely destroyed the African intellectual, cultural and spiritual heritage. Indigenous institutions of knowledge production, conservation and sharing such as initiation schools, indigenous games, agricultural systems, dances and songs, storytelling, proverbs, et cetera, still remain pillars of indigenous African ways of knowing. The wealth of knowledge that still exists among the elders and other knowledge holders in African local communities demonstrates the vibrant intellectualism to which African researchers and intellectuals should turn. It needs to be documented and shared with the youth for sustainability (McNeely, 1999).

African intellectuals should help Africa close the gap created by over four hundred years of domination and marginalisation of African people's knowledge systems, by rejecting the utilisation of dominant western world view of knowing and knowledge production as the only way of knowing. This concern was well articulated by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) in his seminal work on: "*Decolonizing the mind*". African indigenous knowledge should not only be seen as an "alternative" knowledge but as one domain of knowledge among others. The implication for higher education is that research in Africa can no longer be conducted with local communities and people as if their views and personal experiences are of no significance. Taking into consideration the extraversion of African knowledge systems, research should not be taken as an innocent academic exercise but an activity that occurs in a particular set of ideological, political and social frameworks. This is due to the fact that much of the existing research on African communities is still dominated by Euro-centric prejudices (Hountondji, 2002).

There is also the need to change the mindset, attitudes and practices of researchers and extension workers working in African local communities. They need to leave the assumption that the "modern" must replace the "traditional". As outsiders, they must be open and willing to learn from the local people who are the knowledge holders. At the same time, local people, or the "insiders," must appreciate and value their own local knowledge as the basis of their community livelihood and development. This is due to the fact that when people disregard their own knowledge and wisdom, it slowly gets lost and can easily be misappropriated (Battiste, 2002).

Whereas we acknowledge that there is no single approach to IKS research, we put emphasis on participatory approaches and methods which incorporate the knowledge and opinions of local people in the planning and management of research activities in their own settings. These include group dynamics, interviewing, visualisation, etcetera. These techniques avoid writing wherever possible, relying instead on the tools of oral communication like pictures, symbols, physical objects and group discourses. It is on the basis of the above that this paper looks at the challenges of using African

Indigenous knowledge systems as a tool for making higher education relevant to the developmental challenges in South Africa and African at large (Muya, 2007).

The call for the interfacing of IKS with other knowledge systems is based on tenets that it can contribute to humanising the western knowledge systems and will be a major contribution to cognitive justice (Shivji, 2003). The integration of IKS in higher education will promote epistemic pluralism which can only be beneficial system. The holistic approach to knowledge production and dissemination has the potential of placing human needs at the core of higher education.

### **AFRICAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CONTESTATIONS**

The past sections of the paper showed that education, and higher education in particular, in Africa is still too Eurocentric, that is, it is still dominated by European worldviews. This is exemplified by the teaching of social sciences in African higher education institutions, where social theory is still entrenched in the methods, concerns, beliefs and experiences of Western Europe and North America. Its irrelevance to Africa lies on the fact that it is quite inappropriate to attempt to fit African social history and social thought into the confines of a social and political thought that reflects the organisation of Europe 300 years ago (Schutte, 1999).

Eurocentric discourse has greatly influenced research, teaching and learning of social sciences in higher education in Africa: the principal focus of developments in social thought continues to originate from the work of American, British, French and German scholars. The implication of this is that higher educational institutions in Africa have reduced themselves to the reproduction of the intellectual outputs of social thinkers of western countries, including their theories and methodologies of selection of research problem priorities. As a result of this, there is little attention given to African indigenous literary and philosophical traditions because they tend to be viewed as primitive and unscientific and hence not proper sources for social theory and research development. This is accompanied by the inability of African social scientists to generate their own indigenous concepts, definitions, theories and methods which could guide the intellectual development in their research and academic fields.

As a result of lack of confidence in this respect; western research models and theories including concepts are uncritically adopted and applied in African communities which render them irrelevant to local settings. Smith (2002) argues that application of Eurocentric social theories and perspectives in African conditions characterised by poverty tend to be elitist because they focus on the concerns of dominant groups in society hence marginalise the views and concerns of underprivileged social groups.

The integration of African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS) into higher education provides the following opportunities (Battiste, 2002): (i) provides students with the opportunity to learn appropriate community attitudes and values for sustainable

livelihood. This is due to the fact that African indigenous communities have lived in harmony with their environment and utilised natural resources without impairing nature's capacity to regenerate them. AIKS in higher education can help to develop and promote these sensitive and caring values and attitudes for the environment; (ii) students will be able to learn through culture because AIK is stored in various cultural forms, for example, folk stories, songs, folk drama, legends, proverbs, myths, etcetera. The use of these cultural resources in formal education can be very effective in bringing AIKS alive for students. It enables them to conceptualise practically, places and issues in both the local area and beyond their immediate experiences; (iii) involving community knowledge holders in research, teaching, and learning enables students to learn across generations hence making them appreciate and respect the knowledge of elders and other community members. In this context, higher education will be an agency for transferring culture from one generation to the next.

The paper criticizes the various western perceptions levelled against AIKS as a tool for transforming African higher education and meeting the challenges of globalisation:

- (i) The perception that African Indigenous Knowledge Systems have been completely annihilated, hence as a commodity needs to be recaptured, indexed and commercially used. This is contrary to the community perspective of African Indigenous knowledge as an enabling cultural process of cultural, that is, contextually and historically grounded amongst local peoples, rural and urban, certificated and uncertificated, for their own livelihood and advancement. This is also opposite of the western view that African indigenous knowledge is obsolete and static. The community perspective encourages the notion of dynamism which is essential for AIKS based education. This is also useful in the sense that it acknowledges the nature of knowledge, namely, evolving and that it is socially constructed by people to address livelihood needs and challenges.
- (ii) It is against the view that African Indigenous Knowledge Systems lack universal usage because of their localised and community-based nature. This is a simplistic view of the nature of knowledge production and use because all knowledge systems are initially created and utilised locally, but with the potential to be used universally. Nkondo (2012) argues that all knowledge is local but becomes universal through processes of conquest and colonialism. Some knowledge systems due to historical power relations have become more dominant than others hence perceived to be universal. Therefore, Africans need to acknowledge that their indigenous processes of knowing and knowledge production may not only enhance and sustain them as a people, but could also contribute to global pool of knowledge in the search for sustainable solutions to global challenges such as climate change, HIV/AIDS, et cetera). This implies that Africa cannot be excluded from global influences; neither should Africa be guided only by her past because no civilisation (culturally) can manage to develop and prosper in isolation from the 'others' (Vilakazi, 1999, p. 203)

- (iii) The paper refutes the Eurocentric view that Africa was a *tabula rasa* before colonization, that is, it is a continent with no history of civilisation. Therefore, western cultural systems of knowledge should be regarded as the only means to validate the value of Africa's ideas, beliefs and general way of life. It is on the basis of this Eurocentric view that African Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge production are considered unscientific, primitive and incompatible with formal education, especially higher education. They are not able to produce a human capital capable of meeting the challenges of modern science and technology associated with globalisation (McCarthy, 2004).

This view demonstrates the way Eurocentricism has distorted the real meaning of the concept "education". It created and propagated the belief that 'education' means western formal systems of schooling introduced to Africa by colonialism, and further developed by post-independence African governments. However, an examination of the original meaning of the western conceptualisation of "education" shows something quite different from the colonial view. The word "education" is derived from two Latin words: *educare*, 'to rear or foster', and *educere*, 'to draw out or develop'. Thus "education" according to this original conceptualisation incorporates all the processes of raising young people to adulthood, and drawing out or developing their potential to contribute to society. In the African indigenous perspective of education, learning to hunt wild game or herd livestock, prepare food or weave cloth, search for wild honey or distinguish medicinal plants from poisonous ones, is arguably closer to the original western meaning of 'education' than its current limitation to academic and theoretical meaning propagated in higher education institutions (Walter, 2002).

This view should not be interpreted as meaning that literacy, numeracy and the acquisition of new languages are unnecessary. There is no society or culture that can exist in isolation: throughout human history people have always sought ways to communicate with one another, to trade in goods and services, share experiences and cultures including knowledge systems. This has never been more important than it is today in the era of globalisation and increasing interdependence. Nevertheless, what is currently missing, in most societies, is a system of teaching and learning that can combine the two. As Raymond (2011) rightly points out, presently, African children are either kept in their home environments, missing out on the 'modern' aspects of education, or increasingly, forced into full-time formal schooling, missing out on the African 'traditional' education. The western formal education perpetuates the neo-colonial mentality by building aspirations of modern urban life and encouraging the youth to believe that they have no future in rural communities as indigenous knowledge including African indigenous languages are obsolete and incapable of preparing them to meet the challenges of the modern world of science and technology.

The arrogance of Eurocentricism has led to its failure to understand the holistic nature of African traditional education which does separate theory from practice, especially its community-based nature. It is this lack of understanding the holistic nature of African traditional education that led to the fact that one of the most profound effects

of western education on African traditional societies was the radical shift in the locus of power and control over learning from children, families, and communities to ever more centralised systems of authority. Muya (2007) and Kimwaga (2002) elaborate that traditionally, in most African traditional societies, children learn in a variety of ways, that is, free play or interaction with multiple children, immersion in nature, and directly helping adults with work and communal activities. They learn by experience, experimentation, trial and error, by independent observation of nature and human behaviour, and through voluntary community sharing of information, story, song, and ritual.

The institutionalisation of learning based on western liberal values ruined both the freedom of the individual and his/her respect for the elder's wisdom. It led to the marginalisation of the role of the family and community in the education of children at all levels of education including higher education. The inferiorisation of African traditional education including the role of the family and community in formal education by a standardised western education curriculum, places emphasis on an individual's success in a broader consumer culture instead of on an ability to survive in his/her own environment and community. Conversely, from a western perspective, centralised control over learning is seen as natural and consistent with the principles of freedom and democracy (Matike, 2008).

The integration of AIKS at all levels of education in Africa will be beneficial to learners and students because it will enhance the relevance and effectiveness of education by providing with an education that adheres to their own inherent perspectives, experiences, language, and customs. In terms of educational content, the inclusion and interfacing of indigenous knowledge and modern knowledge systems within the curricula, instructional materials, and textbooks will help to prepare students and learners for the greater world (Kante, 2004).

African students and educators share the opportunity to re-evaluate the inherent hierarchy of knowledge systems. This is due to the fact that AIKS were historically denigrated by colonialism and other forms of imperialism. Therefore, their inclusion in the formal education system will enable them to recognise and acknowledge the existence of multiple forms of knowledge rather than one, standard, benchmark system based of western values and ways of knowing. This view is supported by Odora-Hoppers (2001, 17), Vilakazi (1999) and Ntuli (1999), who state that it is crucial that Africa builds on all the valuable indigenous capital of the past and relinquishes all that is deskilling or disempowering and disastrous to her development, advancement and sustainability. Rather than developing an ecologically coded African society which excludes the traditions of knowing of other peoples, an inclusive system and process of traditional knowledge should be deliberately and vigorously sought and implemented in the education system of South Africa and the continent at large. This approach will not only be enriching, but will ensure that the mistakes of the past are never repeated whereby one particular knowledge system is elevated above another.

The National IKS Policy (2004) has identified the promotion of IKS in higher education as a key component of human capital and transformation dimension of higher education to meet the developmental challenges of the country. This is due to the increasing realisation among policy makers, researchers, academics and development agencies that a country's ability to build on and mobilise the knowledge systems available among its people for socio-economic development is as essential as the availability of physical and financial resources. Learning from what local communities already know creates an understanding of local conditions and provides an important context for activities designed to support them.

Moreover, there is the growing recognition that adapting international practices to the local setting helps to improve the impact and sustainability of development assistance. Sharing IK within and across communities can help enhance cross-cultural understanding and promote the cultural dimension of development. The challenge for the development community, therefore, is to find better ways to learn about indigenous institutions, practices, values and, where necessary, adopt and adapt modern techniques (that is, "global best practices") to the local settings. Only then will global knowledge be rendered relevant to the local community needs. The key factor in the adaptation process is the involvement of those who possess and generate indigenous knowledge; the African IK holders and practitioners.

The holistic nature of IKS is recognised by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Agency (2001) as an important strategy for tackling the challenges of sustainable development in Africa. In its Sectoral priorities, Section B5 on Culture, of October 2001, NEPAD categorically states that it will give special attention to the protection and nurturing of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development in Africa. The objective is to make higher education relevant to the developmental challenges of the country and contribute to an African-led globalisation. The success requires a critical interrogation of the relevance of existing western-oriented ways of knowing and methodologies of knowledge production and dissemination that have over the years marginalised African indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge production (McCarthy, 2004).

Various higher education institutions in South Africa have developed initiatives to integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems into their research, teaching, learning and community engagement programmes. One of them is the North-West University. The following sections discusses it prospects and challenges.

### **THE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS TEACHING PROGRAMME AT NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY (SOUTH AFRICA): PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES**

The development and incorporation of the IKS into research, teaching, learning and community engagement curriculum at North-West University at under and post-graduate levels began in 2001. The rationale of integrating IKS into the core business

of the institution, that is, research, teaching, learning and community engagement, was motivated by institutional, national, continental and global imperatives. It was in line with the vision and missions of the institution, the aspirations of the National IKS Policy (2004) and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

A study conducted by Mmola (2010) on Students' and Lecturers' Perceptions Towards the IKS Programme at the North-West University showed that more than 80% of the respondent students had the opinion that lecturers who incorporated indigenous African cultural elements, especially the use of the local language, that is, Setswana, into their teaching practices were highly appreciated by students. They also indicated that such lecturers made them experience a feeling of autonomy by getting the opportunity to learn university education using their own language. Interviews with both respondent students and lecturers (the majority of them being Setswana speaking) revealed that the lecturers who used Setswana in their teaching and interaction with students, incorporated local community practices into lessons, utilised culturally relevant material, were very much appreciated by students.

Interviews with various academic leaders from different departments that incorporated IKS modules in their teaching programmes showed that when AIKS was systemically and holistically included into the curriculum, student achievement improved. This was due to the fact that students could relate what was taught with their own home and community experiences. The respondent academic leaders also indicated that the building of strong relationships between students, researchers, lecturers with student families and local communities created meaningful and positive learning outcomes for students. Respondent students felt that they had benefited from the IKS programme in many ways. The benefits included (in order of most commonly mentioned) gaining new multi- and trans-disciplinary knowledge and skills, especially cultural skills, which could assist them to fit into a wide range of career choices, developing networks for future employment opportunities, and helped them to increase self-esteem or self-worth. It also made them sensitive to the challenges of community livelihood and development.

Interviews with parents and community elders showed that their involvement in the IKS programme and curriculum made them feel needed by the educational system as they were actively participating in the higher education of their children. This is due to the fact that the IKS Programme at North-West University often used Indigenous Knowledge Holders and Practitioners from the surrounding local communities and beyond, as resource persons in specific teaching and learning fields such as African traditional medicine and healing systems, African traditional governance and leadership systems, indigenous natural resource management, etcetera. This provided the students with an opportunity to learn across generations hence making them appreciate and respect the knowledge of these elders and community members.

A study by Raymond (2011) on the use of Multi-media Technology in teaching IKS found that IKS lecturers used this method to encourage students to integrate Indigenous

knowledge into research and learning. Students used multi-media technology in understanding local knowledge and history through interviews with elders and other community knowledge holders and practitioners. For example, a project on Tswana Indigenous Pathways to Health was developed through collaborative efforts between the research students at North-West University and the North-West Provincial Department of Health. It enabled the students to use digital video to document a specific area of Indigenous Knowledge, for example, community health practices, from a community perspective. One IKS research student stated that the use of digital cameras to interview community knowledge holders contributed to a holistic understanding of science from the community perspective.

A number of aspects related to the field could be captured and analysed. An important factor in the research project was to assist the students in developing research skills and values that enhanced respect for community knowledge of the community members. The strong cultural focus of the IKS Programme also engaged students in a variety of activities and relationships with local artists including poets, dancers, writers, and so forth, from the local cultural centre known as Mmabana.

This multi and trans-disciplinary character and strong cultural focus of the IKS Programme attracted an increasing number of students at both under-graduate and postgraduate levels, from different African countries including South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, Cameroon, who have graduated over the years. The programme started with 12 undergraduates in 2001. Currently there are more than 80 students taking the IKS programme as a major. Until April 2012 more than 25 Masters and 3 PhD students have graduated from the Programmes at North-West University. The graduates from the programme are employed in various institutions within and outside South Africa.

Moreover, as part of its community engagement the IKS programme at North-West University has facilitated the establishment of various IKS community projects such as indigenous knowledge - based gardens in schools and local communities in the North-West Province. These AIKS projects generated income, and contributed to food security and nutrition for learners and community members. It has also helped the institution to build networks and partnerships for IKS development with various institutions, schools, communities, civic organisations and policy makers.

However, in spite of these successes the development of the IKS Programme at North-West University has over the years encountered a number of challenges. Although the systemic and holistic inclusion of Indigenous knowledge throughout educational practices and curriculum is a recommendation that appears continuously in the literature and policy statements, unfortunately, like in other African institutions of higher learning this recommendation has been difficult to implement in all campuses of the North-West University, especially in the previous historically 'white campuses'. This was often as a result of existing institutional structures and expectations founded on Eurocentric and colonial educational ideals which are hostile to the promotion of

African Indigenous ways of knowing. The institution is faced with the challenge of developing a system of education for all students that respects the epistemological and pedagogical foundations provided by both African indigenous as well as western cultural traditions.

Furthermore, IKS as a research, teaching, learning and community engagement programme is a new field in South Africa and the continent at large. The North-West University is the only institution in the country and perhaps in the whole of Africa offering an accredited IKS programme at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Therefore, the institution is faced with the problem of shortage of IKS qualified staff to teach and supervise IKS research, especially at the postgraduate levels. There is also the problem of lack of relevant teaching and learning materials. The programme is also faced with the problem of support from some institutional staff members including parts of the management due to limited knowledge and awareness on the importance of IKS in meeting the developmental challenges of the 21st Century. For instance, most academics at the institution still do not understand the relationship between IKS and other fields of knowledge, especially in areas of Science and Technology.

In order to meet these challenges there was need for more aggressive marketing and awareness campaigns on the programs within and outside South Africa. The Program coordinators in collaboration with the National IKS Office (Department of Science and Technology, 2004) and South African Qualification Authority worked together to register a professional four year Bachelor of IKS (BIKS) which integrates both the natural and social sciences. This was meant to ensure that IKS is not limited to the humanities. The existing program was mostly composed of human and social science modules. Moreover, the SADC Ministerial Conference on IKS Policy which met in the Seychelles in August 2009 adopted the BIKS Program as a regional program. This will promote IKS regionally and establish a network of staff and other resources for promoting the teaching, research and community engagement in the program.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this examination on the role of African indigenous knowledge systems in promoting the relevance of higher education in South Africa, the paper concludes that the western approach to higher education in Africa is too academic. It has created a contradiction between learning and living among graduates by making higher education too distant from the developmental challenges facing the surrounding communities. The graduates tend to be inadequately prepared to meet these challenges. The paper suggests that the holistic and community-based nature of AIKS could help to mitigate this contradiction due to its emphasis on the merger between theory and practice including the importance of using local languages in social practice, teaching, and learning. This puts knowledge production and sharing at both community and global level in its cultural context by involving the community knowledge holders as producers and users in the core business of higher education. It is on the basis of this consideration that the paper suggests the following: (i) the core business of

higher education, that is, research, teaching and learning should be participatory by involving community knowledge holders in the core business of higher education; (ii) in order to provide guidance to the process of integrating AIKS into the core business of higher education, the promoters of AIKS should produce an African indigenous theory of “knowledge” based on the rich history of ideas and intellectual development in Africa. This indigenous theoretical framework should also clarify on the role and relevance of African indigenous languages in knowledge production and sharing in the era of globalisation; (iii) the experiences of integrating IKS in higher education at the North-West University in South Africa demonstrated that the sustainable development of the process requires a strong institutional commitment in terms of a conceptual understanding (on the part of the management) with regard to the importance of AIKS in higher education; human capital, finance and material support for the development of the various activities associated with AIKS in the core business of the institution.

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