



# Indigenous Knowledge in Africa: an organic intervention to healthcare problems in Africa

Prof JR Maluleka  
Department of Information Science  
College of Human Sciences  
UNISA

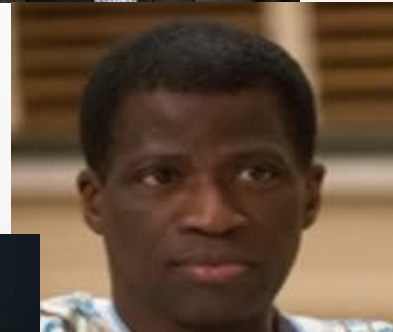
Define tomorrow.

UNISA



# Personal Background

*Mahlaku a maswa a ema ka a matala*



# Setting the Scene

- Perceptions and Eurocentric views that Africa had nothing before the colonisers.
- Western cultural systems of knowledge are regarded as the only means to validate African ways of life even amongst Africans.
- African Indigenous ways of knowing and doing things are considered unscientific and primitive even amongst some of the intelligent minds in Africa.
- Africans had their own indigenous institutions to deal with social, psychological and physical problems before the arrival of colonizers.
- Colonisers imposed their ways on Africa for a reason (no comeback from a destroyed identity) e.g., invasion of Iraq

# PEOPLE LIVING IN AFRICA

## World Population by Region

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#	Region	Population (2023)	Yearly Change	Net Change	Density (P/Km <sup>2</sup> )	Land Area (Km <sup>2</sup> )	Migrants (net)	Fert. Rate	Med. Age	Urban Pop %	World Share
1	Asia	4,753,079,727	0.64 %	30,444,963	153	31,033,131	-1,487,191	1.9	32	52.6 %	59.1 %
2	Africa	1,460,481,772	2.37 %	33,745,467	49	29,648,481	-535,151	4.2	19	44.7 %	18.2 %
3	Europe	742,272,652	-0.17 %	-1,283,113	34	22,134,900	792,167	1.5	42	75.7 %	9.2 %
4	Latin America and the Caribbean	664,997,121	0.72 %	4,728,047	33	20,139,378	-161,800	1.8	31	84 %	8.3 %
5	Northern America	378,904,407	0.54 %	2,033,711	20	18,651,660	1,249,364	1.6	38	82.8 %	4.7 %
6	Oceania	45,575,768	1.19 %	537,216	5	8,486,460	142,770	2.1	33	66 %	0.6 %

○ Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 18,2% of the global Population (1.4 billion)(Worldometer 2024)

By comparison, Asia 59.1%, Europe 9.2% for ; Latin America and the Caribbean 8.3%, North America 4.7%(Worldometer 2024)

# Indigenous Knowledge



- IK as tacit know-how that is community based, unique, complex, dynamic, non-formal and transmitted from one generation to the next in various contexts ( cultural, ecological, economic, ethical, political, social, spiritual and technological) (Ngulube, Dube and Mhlongo 2015)
- Support indigenous communities in solving problems and making decisions that are fundamental to their existence
- Integral part of African communities.
- Sustained Africa's indigenous communities for centuries
- Survived from one generation to the next through oral tradition

# Indigenous Knowledge in Africa



- IK by its nature it is not documented, which made it not so easy to measure.
- Passed from one generation to the next orally
- Often subjected to prejudice
- Indigenous communities were made to believe western knowledge was superior
- Contributions made by Africa and her people to history and civilisation are conspicuously missing
- IK serves as a basic input to sustainable development,

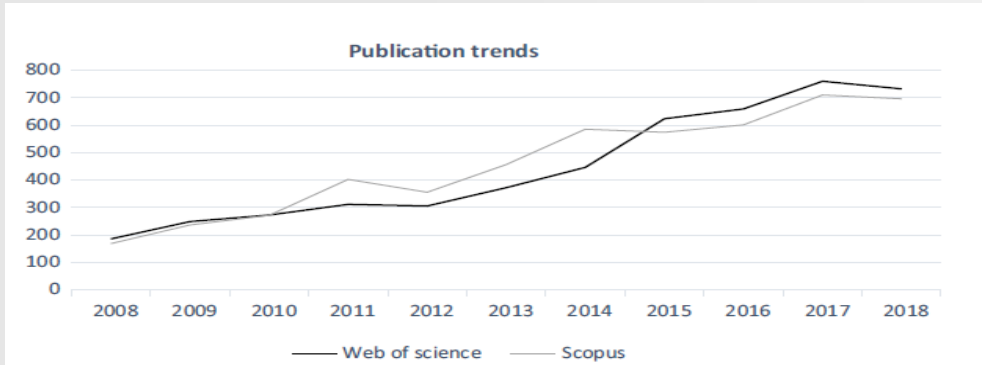
# IKS categories



Indigenous Knowledge, sometimes referred to as people's science cuts across all major fields

- Astronomy
- Agriculture
- Law
- Medicine
- Politics
- Health
- Religion
- Music
- Arts etc

# IKS Research in Africa



- Growing interest in IKS research especially in RSA and Nigeria
- From 2009 –steady increase of publications from WoS and Scopus
- More outputs were in Medicine, Pharmacology and Agricultural sciences
- Research sponsored externally

*Web of Science(N=4924)		*Scopus(N=5065)			
Rank	Research areas	Count	Rank	Research areas	Count
1	Environmental Sciences Ecology	664	1	Social Sciences	1902
2	Plant Sciences	471	2	Agricultural and Biological sciences	1178
3	Public Environmental Occupational Health	418	3	Environmental Science	808
4	Pharmacology Pharmacy	362	4	Medicine	785
5	Agriculture	341	5	Arts and Humanities	453
6	Science Technology Other Topics	285	6	Pharmacology, toxicology and Pharmaceutics	366
7	Education Educational Research Integrative Complementary Medicine	271	7	Earth and Planetary Sciences	309
8	Business Economics	212	8	Biochemistry, Genetics and Molecular Biology	308
9	Health Care Sciences Services	169	9	Information Science, Library Science	287
10	Infectious Diseases	148	10	Engineering	223
11	Tropical Medicine	145	11	Economics, Ergonomics and Finance	222
12	General Internal Medicine	139	12	Computer Science	210
13	Social Sciences Other Topics	134	13	Business management accounting	178
14	Computer Science	125	14	Immunology and Microbiology	129
15	Veterinary Sciences	113	15	Health professions	125



# Indigenous Institutions

- Africans had their own indigenous institutions to deal with social, psychological and physical problems.
  - Legal/Social institutions (dealt with disputes that arose in any family or society);
  - Political institutions (kingdoms existed as independent entities which resulted from conquests or voluntary submissions);
  - Education (well-known ones are initiation schools for boys and girls);
  - Health (traditional healers and the use of herbs).

(Ayittey 1991); (Kaniki and Mphahlele 2002)

# Resources found in Africa



- Oil
- Coffee
- Diamonds
- Gold
- Natural Gas
- Copper
- Platinum
- Uranium
- Iron Ore
- Cotton



# **Some of the Problems**



# Famine and Poverty



- 226.7 million people are starving in Africa.
- The countries most affected by extreme poverty and hunger in Africa are mainly those located south of the Sahara.
- One in four people suffers from hunger there
- The share of the world's hungry is highest in sub-Saharan Africa.
- 40% to 50% of people live below the poverty line
- daily income that is on average below \$1.25.
- sub-Saharan Africa, is one of the poorest regions affected by famine and poverty.

# Ubuntu

- Africans have always been caring people who are driven by the spirit of Ubuntu.
- The spirit that encourages community equality and propagating the distribution of wealth.
- Capitalism which is foreign to Africa is a direct opposite of Ubuntu as it encourages private ownership of the means of production.
- Indigenous knowledge teaches us that those with little resources would be given *dikgomo tsa mafisa* from the wealthy.
- The practice took care of famine and ensured that every household had food on the table.
- Africa has enough resources to feed all her children.

# Crime



- Since 2000, violent crime in Africa has been following an increasing trend.
- In 2022, violent attacks aimed at civilians reached their highest
- The high rate of violence against women and girls in Africa is maintained by the persistence of harmful gender norms, alcohol use and overall increased poverty
- The continent has a high prevalence of GBV

# Initiation schools



- Africans take pride in this institution
- A perfect platform to train children in to becoming responsible adults
- Evolve to address the current societal problem
  - Gender based Violence
  - Crime



**Healthcare**



# Indigenous healthcare

- Research shows that the majority of the population in Africa consults traditional healers and depend on indigenous medical knowledge for survival (Ijumba and Barron 2005; Denis 2006; Truter 2007).
- Poorna, Mymoon and Hariharan (2014:1240), the World Health Organization (WHO 1998) report estimated that 70% to 80% of the population in developing countries dependent on traditional medicines for their primary health care needs.
- Traditional healing is the first choice for primary health care in rural communities because of trust, affordability and proximity.
- Herbal medicines are harmless and free of side effects because they are natural.

# Traditional healers

There is a large variety of traditional healers, including the following (Hoff 1992):

- Herbalists (a person who studies herbal medicine and the healing properties of plants).
- Spiritual healers (a person who uses prayer to do the healing work).
- Ayurvedic and Unani practitioners (these are traditional medicine practitioners in the Middle East and South-Asian countries).
- Traditional midwives (traditional childbirth care providers using the knowledge gained through the traditions and practices of their own communities).
- Bone-setters (this group of healers can be called traditional physiotherapists because they deal with joint manipulation, joint dislocations, bone fractures and other bone-related problems).
- Magico-religious practitioners (culturally recognised healers involved in interaction with supernatural entities or powers).

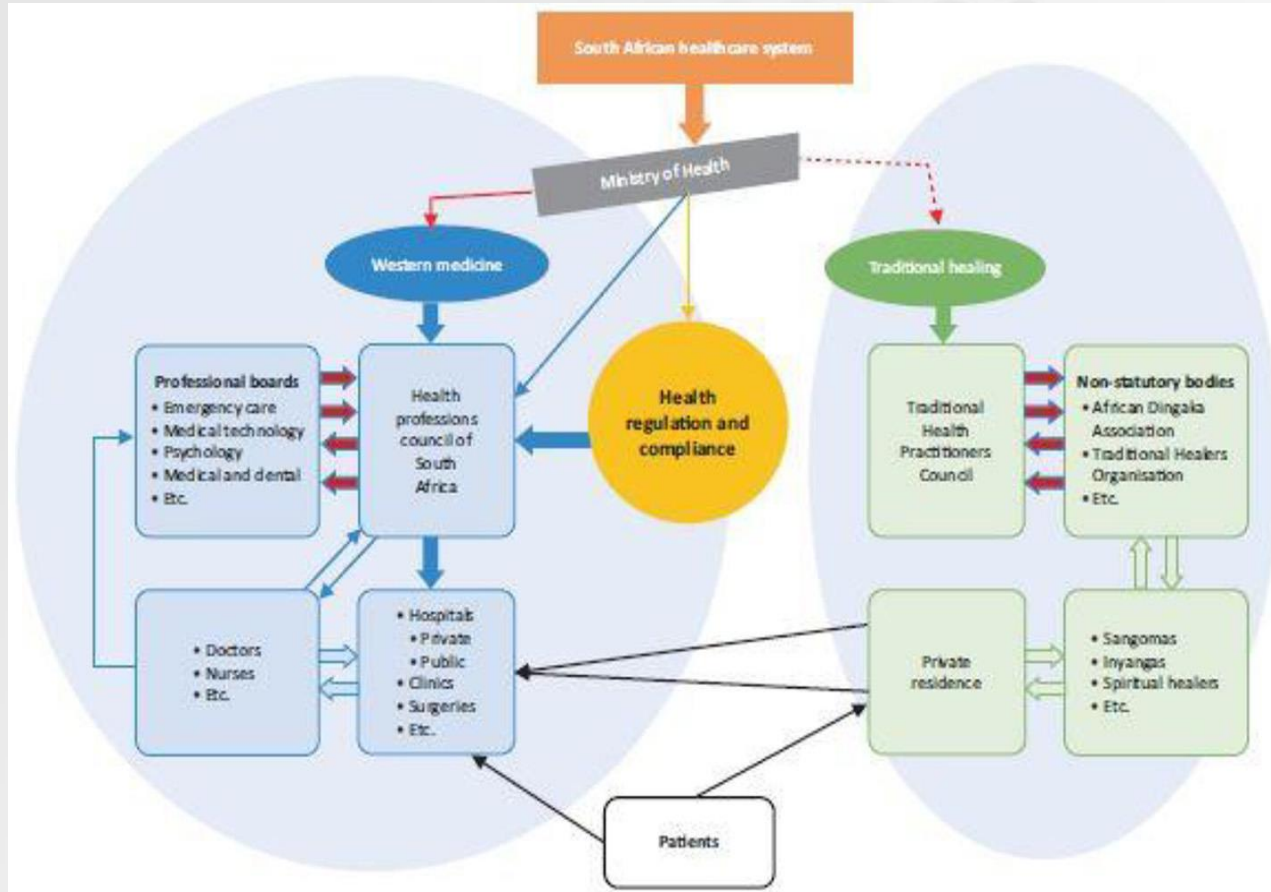
# Historical problems

- African traditional beliefs were always widely practised in secret
- Religion, especially Christianity, which is the most popular religion in Africa, strongly opposed indigenous healing.
- Some churches openly discouraged their members from consulting indigenous healers, because they believed that indigenous healers worship the ancestors and not God, which is seen as a sin in the Christian orthodoxy (Mokgobi, 2014:24).
- The erosion of African beliefs and practices was aggressively done and well planned and carried out through missionaries.
- The missionaries such as Congregational, Methodist, Anglican, Lutheran and Catholic, who were aggressively opposed to indigenous African practices, because, according to them, these practices were barbaric and based on superstitions

# Traditional healing in South Africa

- Traditional healing and the use of traditional medicines were historically banned by the South African apartheid government
- South African apartheid government passed into law the Suppression of Witchcraft Act in 1957, a piece of colonial legislation, which declared divination including traditional healing to be illegal, thereby theoretically making the work of traditional healers impossible (Union Gazette Extraordinary 1957:3).
- Traditional healing was associated with witchcraft and that stigma continues to shadow traditional healing even today.
- The dawn of democracy saw a change in the laws, which gave freedom to the traditional African practices.
- Nevertheless, many South Africans are still divided between Western- and traditional African philosophies

# Status of healthcare in South Africa



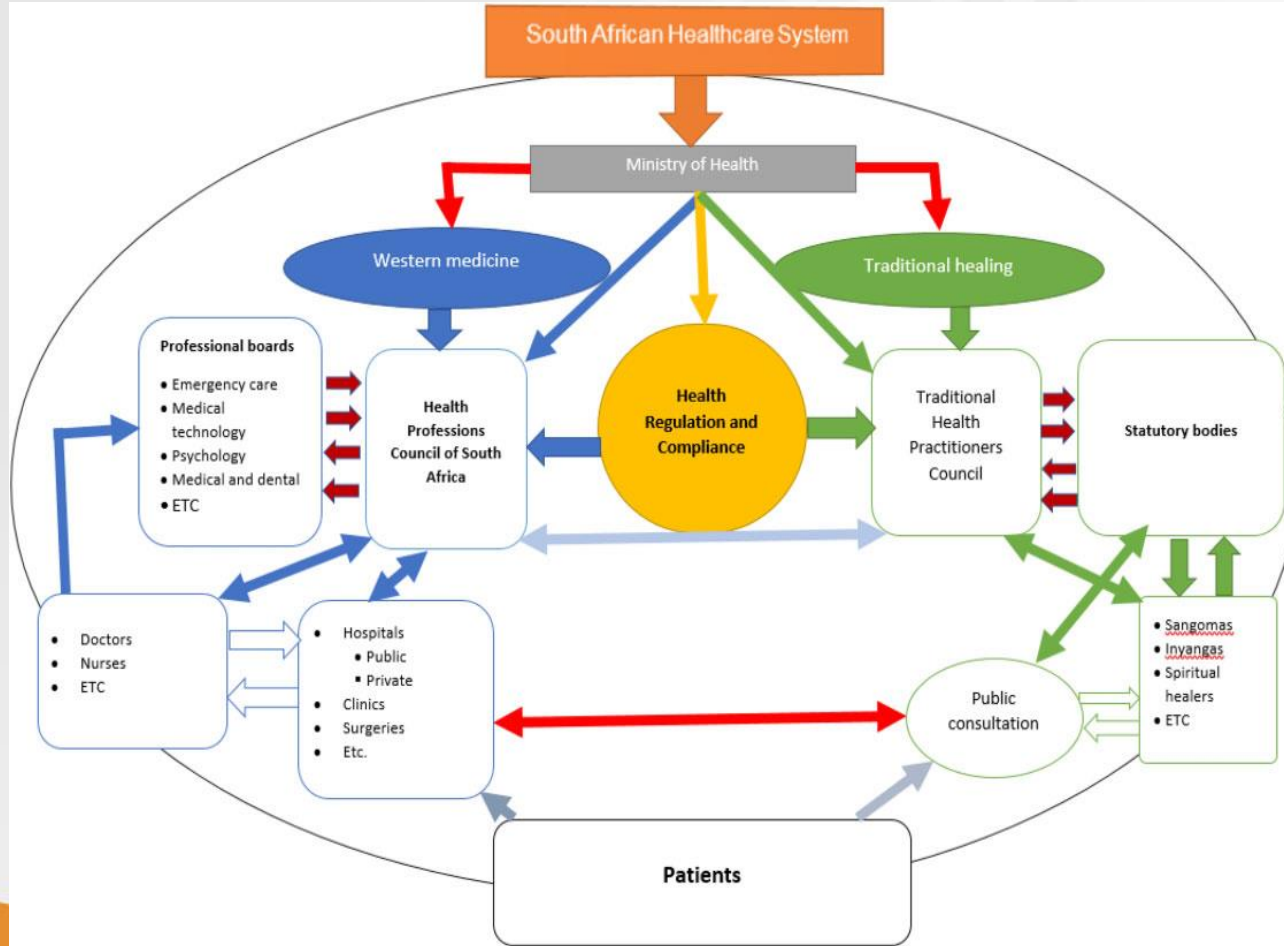
Source: Adopted from maluleka (2020:p.12)

- Healthcare is skewed towards the western system Western medicine properly regulated
- Traditional healing is marginalised
- Traditional healing is not properly regulated
- The laws passed by government on traditional healing are not enforced.
- Traditional healers in South Africa operate in isolation, and there is no support or proper collaboration from the government side despite them playing an important role in the national health systems
- There is no direct contribution to the economy from traditional healing because they work independently

# New generation of healers

- Healers embracing technology
- Healers are already engaging clients through social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc)
- Technology opened easier opportunities for bogus healers
- Unsuspecting people are made to buy useless magical things on social media in the name of healing.
- The digital space is very slippery and not so easy for the society to identify real healers in the space full of tricksters

# Integrating traditional healing to the National Healthcare system



- The government must take an active role in ensuring that healers are formally incorporated into the country's healthcare system
- The policies passed by government on traditional healing need to be implemented and enforced
- The Traditional Health Practitioners Council must collaborate with different associations for a proper cleanup

# In conclusion

- Africans needs no validation from anyone in the use of knowledge that carried them for ages.
- African scholars needs to take the lead in documenting Africa's knowledge without external influences.
- Community leaders should play an active role in educating the youth about African practices and philosophies and how important it is to preserve them.
- Indigenous ways of healing should be integrated into the mainstream healthcare system in every African country.
- Africans' trusts, affords, and regularly consults with their healers (Herbalists, spiritual leaders, traditional midwives etc) – this is usually done in secret because of the stigma attached.
- Governments needs to do more to support healers so that they can also contribute to the economy.
- Strong regulatory structures are required to ensure that criminal elements are eliminated and that all legitimate healers are registered.
- Traditional healing has stood the test of time and proved to be a natural intervention to addressing health problems in Africa



# In closing

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- Africa needs strong leaders who will make firm African decisions.
- As Africans, we cannot afford to continue with this box ticking exercises when it comes to issues of Africanization and Decolonization.
- Indeed, some of Africa's problems , requires African solutions.





# Thank you for your attention

When something is important enough, you do it, even when the odds are not in your favour.  
Elon Musk