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Envisioning the indigenised university for sustainable development

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Table 1. Participant distribution

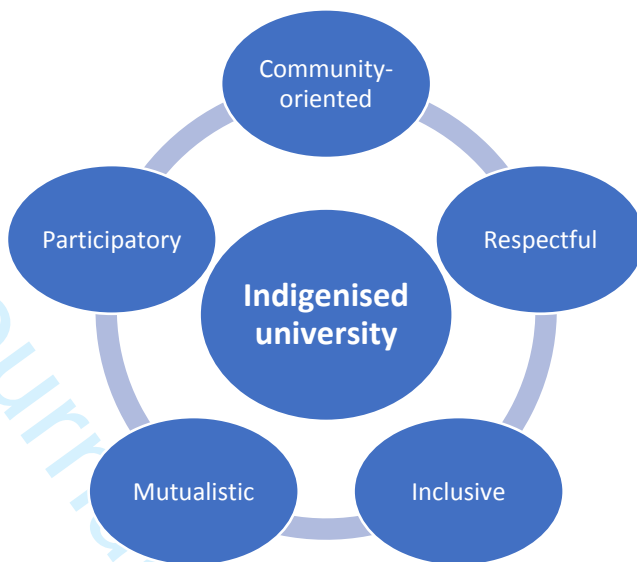|	Total	Gender	Age	Occupation	Length of service	Educational qualification
Academic staff	24	F = 7; M = 17	31 – 70	Teaching and Research	1 – 15 years	Minimum of Masters (Eleven Doctorates)
Administrative staff	4	F = 0; M = 4	31 - 60	Administration	2 – 30 years	Minimum of Masters (One Doctorate)
Community member	12	F = 6; M = 6	41 – 80+	Farming	Lifetime	No formal education (Except one Primary 6)

Figure 1. Attributes of the indigenised university

Envisioning the Indigenised university for sustainable development

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Abstract

Purpose

While the possibility of a university fostering sustainable development is present in the extant literature and policy documents, the idea still warrants further consideration. This paper, therefore, aims to identify the nature and outcomes of the university's engagement with Indigenous communities and perceptions of Indigenous knowledge systems in both academic and non-academic activities, and what might be required to foster the university's contributions toward sustainable development.

Design/methodology/approach

A qualitative case study of the only public university in The Gambia was conducted, including non-university actors. Interviews and focus group discussion methods were employed, and these enabled close collaboration between researchers and participants, and the latter were empowered to describe their perceptions of reality.

Findings

Three major sets of findings emerged from the analysis of the transcripts from interviews and focus group discussions with the university and community members. These are the limited nature of and outcomes from university-community engagement, the sustainable outcomes of Indigenous practices, and ideas for Indigenising university engagement for sustainable development.

Originality

Matters of the university reaching out to Indigenous peoples have yet to find their way into conceptualisations of the university for sustainable development. This paper addresses this gap in the existing literature by advancing possibilities for the Indigenised university for sustainable development to emerge.

Keywords: The University; Indigenous Knowledge; Sustainable Development; The Gambia

Introduction

Universities have the potential to contribute to sustainable development (Blum et al., 2013; Preece, Ntseane, & MmaB, 2012; Leal Filho, 2011; Franklin, 2009), including through their operation and management (Van Weenen, 2000; Utama et al., 2018), research (Waas et al., 2010; Huge et al., 2016; Manring, 2014), and teaching and learning (Zamora-Polo & Sánchez-Martín, 2019; Wilheml et al., 2019). Sustainable development 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987, p. 43). The concept is widely contested and considered contradictory by many academics due to competing interests in environmental, social, and economic development (Hickel, 2019; Elliott, 2012; Blewitt, 2012). Yet, Sachs et al. (2019) outlined six transformations to achieve the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out by the United Nations, with the first transformation comprising higher education interventions.

It has been argued that higher education institutions have the potential to significantly influence, as well as act as agents of change in the realisation of the SDGs (Leal Filho et al., 2019). However, it can also be maintained that they cannot effectively contribute to sustainable development without being sustainable in the first instance – as it is commonly said "you cannot give what you do not have". Fundamentally, the sustainable university can be said to capture the essence, subject, or inclination to sustainability in its vision, mission, policies, goals, structures, strategies, reports, et cetera. Lukman and Glavicˇ (2007) assert that the sustainable university should incorporate the different realms of sustainable development, notably environmental protection, social cohesion, and economic performance. Drawing from the authors' insight, this holistic approach can be operationalised via a policy framework, operational strategies, evaluation methods, and optimisation approaches. Referring to sustainability policies at universities, Leal Filho (2011) argues that they are useless unless matched with concrete actions. An inexhaustive list of actions the sustainable university promotes include campus greening; embedding elements of sustainability in courses and university programmes; as well as conducting ethically sound research for the wider public good.

As the sustainable university reflects on avenues to foster sustainable development beyond its structures and spheres of operation, there is a need to consider the role of Indigenous

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knowledge systems. This is significant as the United Nations (2015) recognises the contributions of Indigenous peoples as essential to achieving the SDGs. However, extant literature is not explicit about how the university can involve Indigenous peoples in their orientations toward sustainable development. Indigenous peoples live on ancestral homelands around the world (United Nations, 2009) and occupy various university roles, including as students, employees, and administrators, but their voices and developmental needs have been marginalised in universities (Bunda, Zipin, & Brennan, 2012; Mamdani, 2016; Shava & Nkopodi, 2020). In support of his concept of the ecology of knowledges, de Sousa Santos (2014) outlined how and why we need to critically engage and amplify alternate ways of knowing and knowledges sourced from the un(under)valued and un(under)recognised Global South.

The idea of an ecology of knowledges is 'an invitation to the promotion of non-relativistic dialogues among knowledges, granting equality of opportunities to the different kinds of knowledge engaged in ever broader epistemological disputes aimed both at maximising their respective contributions to build a more democratic and just society and at decolonising knowledge and power' (de Sousa Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007: xx). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding empirical knowledge as to what a university looks like that is concerned to build an ecology of knowledges in an Indigenous environment, from the standpoints of both academics and community members. In addition, a proliferation of ideas of the university, to escape the current limited horizons and open up thinking and so 'freeing the university from its self-imposed conceptual shackles', is also desirable (Barnett 2013, p.5).

The purpose of this paper is therefore to present the idea of the Indigenised university for sustainable development – a university oriented towards local Indigenous communities, and with an explicit interest in their sustainable development. This was realised through a theoretical grounding and a thematic analysis of findings from an empirical study with university and community members in an Indigenous setting. To provide a context for this study, an interrogation of Indigenous knowledge systems and their link with the academy is first provided.

Indigenous knowledge and the academy

The scientific knowledge system has a privileged position in academia, so implicitly down-valuing Indigenous knowledge systems (IKSs) (Moahi, 2012; Chilisa, 2017). IKSs are cultural, traditional, and local knowledges that are unique to a specific society or culture and encompass skills and technology derived from local systems of production and consumption (Ubisi,

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Kolanisi, & Jiri, 2020; Derbile, 2013). An example is the Indigenous weather forecasting system based on the appearance and behaviour of flora and fauna (Mbah, Ajaps, & Molthan-Hill, 2021). Through research with Indigenous peoples, this knowledge could be integrated with the scientific forecasting system in the academy to expand existing knowledge of weather forecasting and identify commonalities and possibilities.

Although IKSs are increasingly being engaged in mainstream institutions such as universities (Mbah, Johnson & Chipindi, 2021; Moahi, 2012; Gilmore & Smith, 2005), only particular aspects are usually recognised, such as herbal medicine (Anywar et al. 2020; Kamboj, 2000). This is due to the perceived problematic nature of the wider worldviews of Indigenous people, which are felt to require scrutiny for appropriateness and, in particular, are judged against the scientific method (Briggs & Sharp, 2004; Barasa, 2009). Furthermore, IKSs are also commonly adjudged to lack universality (Kaya, 2013). However, IKSs prompt an 'unravelling [of] systematic power relations that have assured the dominance of particular ways of knowing in the academy' (Dei, 2014, p.6). The mainstream or scientific knowledge system maintains its hegemony, with a resultant marginalisation of IKSs in the academy (Chilisa, 2017).

Where Indigenous knowledge is treated seriously, 'the superiority of a given way of knowing is no longer assessed by its level of institutionalisation and professionalisation but rather by its pragmatic contribution to a given practice' (de Sousa Santos, 2009:118). So, all knowledges are experimental ways of knowing and their deployment should be based on their perceived or real problem-solving potential, especially with respect to the sustainable development goals. This can be done through increased university-community engagement, especially community-based research. University-community engagement refers to 'sustainable networks, partnerships, communication media, and activities between higher education institutions and communities at local, national, regional, and international levels.' (Jacob et al., 2015, p.1). It has been framed in various ways, but usually within the categories of community-based research, community-service learning, and adult education (Hall, 2009).

Community-based research has at its core, community involvement through all stages of a research process. Its major attributes are that it is community situated, of practical relevance to the community, collaborative, and action-oriented (Bischoff & Jany, 2018). Indeed, as evidenced by Bird-Naytowhow et al.'s (2017) study with Indigenous Canadian youth, the university can engage positively with Indigenous people by building relationships and positive visions, approaching a community using their ethical standards and cultural protocols, and opening safe spaces for the wider community and civic engagement. Thus, with community-

based research held clearly in view, we explored the implications of the ideas of the university in Indigenous settings, sustainable development, and an ecology of knowledges and, on that basis, develop a novel imagining of the university.

Theoretical frameworks

In Sen's (2000) view, political liberties and democratic rights were adjudged to be among the constituent components of development. Therefore, the attainment of independence by African countries and the establishment of state-owned universities were supposed to foster development. However, teaching and research were based on the knowledge system built on Western epistemologies and worldviews, and so the voices of Indigenous people were absent in these universities (Mamdani, 2016). This amplifies Spivak's (1988) argument that the 'subalterns' cannot seriously speak because, in order to be heard, they have to express themselves with Western concepts and languages. This discursive injustice Spivak termed 'epistemic violence'. hooks (1990) contextualised this situation in her attempts to be heard from the margins and her feeling of being silenced by Western researchers who would only meet her at the centre: 'no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself…I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way' (p. 343).

Although Escobar (1995) argued that the subalterns do in fact speak, until the ontological and epistemological status of their knowledge system is on a par with the scientific knowledge system, their voices will continue to be appropriated and obscured in translations. The parity of knowledge systems requires a counter-hegemonic engagement with and an amplification of Indigenous knowledges within the framework of hegemonic frameworks (de Sousa Santos, 2014). This means that, far from refusing or relegating science, alternative knowledge systems are placed in the context of the multiplicity or ecology of knowledges (de Sousa Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007; Bhabha 2013, hooks, 1990). Furthermore, since postcolonial cultures are a combination of colonist and Indigenous cultures, postcolonial and Indigenous peoples' cultures are located in a hybrid or third space (Bhabha, 2013). This space can become emancipatory through successful intercultural translation (de Sousa Santos, 2014), where the idea of equality is the ideal of equal differences among different cultures.

By embracing the idea of a hegemony-free ecology of knowledges in its engagement with local communities, the university can begin to undo the epistemic violence experienced by Indigenous peoples and hence contributes to sustainable development. Boyer (1996, p.32) provided a model for university-community engagement whereby the resources of the

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university are connected to "our most pressing social, civil, and ethical problems". This is amplified by Barnett (2011) in his idea of the ecological university, which locates the university within several ecologies and one that seeks to address the needs of these ecologies, including its own needs, in a symbiotic relationship – one that can lead to sustainable development, and mutually benefits all parties.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals capture the development ambitions, as well as aspirations of the world (Leal Filho, 2019) and a university that centres local communities in its research activities could contribute to peace and prosperity for the people and the planet, now and into the future as it attempts to address these aspirations. This can also be attained via scholarships of discovery, integration, knowledge sharing, and application as means of creating spaces where academic and civic cultures interconnect continuously and within a context of creativity in enlarging the public sphere and enriching the quality of life for everyone (Boyer, 1996; Mtawa et al., 2016). However, the university with these forms of scholarship, that has a mission to contribute to sustainable development, needs to further rethink its positioning, for relevant, relatable, and sustainable outcomes. These theoretical foundations, therefore, form the basis for asserting the idea of the Indigenised university, as explicated in the ensuing section.

Considerations for the Indigenised university

The Indigenised university can be conceived as a university that engages Indigenous knowledge holders and the knowledges they express through different forms of scholarships and enterprise activities, for the common good. Figure 1 reveals some of the distinctive attributes of the Indigenised university, these are:

  i. *Respectful*: Indigenous people and their knowledge are centred, and the ecology of knowledges is valued. There is reciprocal trust and a significant level of knowledge transfer between the university and local communities (Santamaria-Graff & Boehner, 2019). The university is also transparent about its mission.

  ii. *Participatory*: Problem identification and solution development are jointly enacted by the university and local communities through emancipatory and empowering methodologies such as participatory action research (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2013), community-based participatory research (Hacker et al., 2012), focus group discussions (Hennink,

2013) and relational dialogue (Chilisa, 2017). Communities also take responsibility for monitoring the progress of any project being implemented.

iii. *Community-oriented*: Focus is on the sustainable development of the community, and community members drive the development agenda. This is based on the notion that if adequate resources and information are accessible to communities, they are better placed to determine how their lives and livelihoods can be improved (Seyfang & Smith, 2007).

iv. *Inclusive*: Research is based on the entire community's interests and needs, from the older to the younger generations (McKemmish et al., 2012). No group is excluded, based on age, gender, sexual orientation, religion or family position.

v. *Mutualistic*: Through interconnections, local communities and universities leverage some of their resources to address specific community crises and the university's limited resources for mutual benefits (Mbah, 2016; Khalaf, 2017). The university is also honest about the limits of its ability to solve problems or create change. Guided by the ubuntu philosophy of human interdependence and humaneness (Waghid, 2020), social responsibility, deliberative engagement, and attentiveness to others epitomise the university.
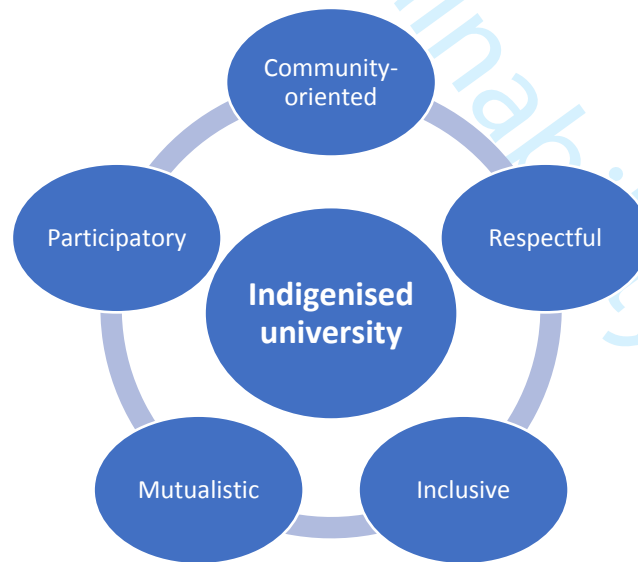

Figure 1. *Attributes of the indigenised university*

Contextual background

Following the independence of most African countries in the twentieth century, their universities were created and charged with helping the newly independent countries develop,

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specifically by building capacities needed to sustain national change (Ajayi, 1996). The development agenda was also extended to the existing universities established during the colonial era. Emphasis is placed here on The Gambia. Located on the West African coast, The Gambia occupies a total area of 10,689km^2 and its 2020 population estimate was 2,173,999, with a variety of ethnic groups including Mandinka 34%, Fula 30%, Wolof 11%, Jola 9%, and Sarahule 8%, among others (NPCS, 2005). The official language is English, and The Gambia's economy is dominated by farming, fishing, and tourism. The Gambia is the focus of this study because the country does not feature often in the literature, especially with respect to university-community engagement and its relationship with Indigenous knowledge systems. It is also within a region that requires significant progress to achieve the UN's seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) due to the relatively high level of poverty, hunger, and inequality (UN, 2019). Furthermore, the Gambia ranks 172nd out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index, which measures average achievement in a baseline standard of living, knowledge, and long and healthy life; this puts the country in the Low Human Development category (UNDP, 2020).

This project focuses on the higher education sector in The Gambia as public universities in Africa are often guided by and evaluated on their contribution to development (Ajayi, 1996). Here, we highlight the University of The Gambia (UTG) which was established by an Act of the National Assembly of The Gambia in March 1999. By 2017, the university had 313 academic staff and 6000 students (UTG, 2021). As the only State-owned university in the country, the university has a mandate to contribute to the community and national socio-economic development. Its motto in English is 'Knowledge, Truth, & Development' and on the university's website, the first line of its 'Vision and Mission' is 'Promoting equitable and sustainable socio-economic development of communities…' (UTG, 2021).

Furthermore, as part of a partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the university recently announced a Sustainable Development Goal Challenge beginning 4 May 2021 where teams of students pitch ideas oriented towards the UN's SDGs. By focusing on sustainable development in its vision and mission statement and in its partnership with the UNDP, the UTG has created awareness of the SDGs among its members. This was also evident in the interviews with university participants, which conveys rich descriptions of how the university can work with local communities to attain the SDGs.

Methodology

We employed a qualitative approach in this case study, enabling an exploration of a phenomenon within its context using varied data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). The interviews and focus group discussion methods employed enabled close collaboration between researchers and participants, and the latter were empowered to describe their perceptions of reality. Centring participants' voices is important for this study in order to contribute to the legitimation of Indigenous voices (Maistry & Lortan, 2017; Ndofirepi & Gwaravanda, 2019).

Forty participants took part in this study and Table 1 shows their distribution. The University's staff membership is male dominant, and this is reflected in the number of female participants. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, by employing the combination of opportunistic and snowball sampling strategies (Suri, 2011). Ethical approval was secured, participants consented, and sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed. Sessions with academics were conducted in English but the community members had an interpreter as they could seldom speak English. Furthermore, in the sessions with community members, questions were given comprehensive explanations, contextualisation, and reiteration to prevent ambiguity or misinterpretation.

Table 1. *Participant distribution*

	Total	Gender	Age	Occupation	Length of service	Educational qualification
Academic staff	24	F = 7; M = 17	31 – 70	Teaching and Research	1 – 15 years	Minimum of Masters (Eleven Doctorates)
Administrative staff	4	F = 0; M = 4	31 - 60	Administration	2 – 30 years	Minimum of Masters (One Doctorate)
Community member	12	F = 6; M = 6	41 – 80+	Farming	Lifetime	No formal education (Except one Primary 6)

The fieldwork ran from 26 August to 7 September 2019. Depending on the nature and depth of the matters being explored, interviews of 30-60 minutes were conducted with administrative and academic staff, while two focus group discussions that took the form of relational dialogue of about 60 minutes, with six people in each group, were held with community members. Community members came from a village called Pirang and they participated in the sessions with their local chief known as Alkilo. Twenty-four academics and four administrators took part in the one-to-one semi-structured interviews while the twelve community members took

part in two focus groups along gender lines, given the patriarchal nature of their society. Other researchers have found that Indigenous women are more forthcoming in focus group discussions when not in the presence of men (Walshe & Argumedo, 2016; Theodory, 2020).

The research questions we aimed to address in this study are:

a.   What is the nature and what are the outcomes of university engagement?

b.   To what extent and how do academics and community members locate Indigenous knowledge within their activities?

c.   How can university-community engagement be Indigenised towards sustainable development?

Analysis

The recorded interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim and thematic analysis was deployed – a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Six phases for thematic analysis were followed: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and then examining the data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The actual process of coding and theme identification involved a reading of the entire transcript first. Then it was read again with the highlighting of central and recurring ideas which were labelled with initial codes. These codes were then reconsidered and organised into themes, which were then reviewed and examined. This process followed the reflexive approach proposed by Braun & Clarke (2019), where the coding process is organic and flexible, and themes capture shared meaning around a central idea. Thematic analyses are advantageous because of the theoretical and research design flexibility they afford and also the inductive development of codes and themes from the data (Saldana, 2009).

Attention was paid to latent coding and theme identification (Boyatzis, 1998) so that underlying ideas, patterns, and assumptions were captured. For coding reliability and quality, data from the different sources were converged and analysed concurrently (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Furthermore, data triangulation and investigator triangulation were employed and these involved data collection from two sources and data analyses by two investigators respectively (Russell & Gregory, 2003). Analysis and interpretation were primarily data-driven because the intention was to pay due attention to Indigenous voices (Spivak, 1988; hooks, 1990).

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Findings

Three major sets of findings emerged from our analysis of the interviews and focus group discussions with the university and community members. These are the limited nature of and outcomes from university engagement, the sustainable outcomes of Indigenous practices, and ideas for Indigenising university engagement for sustainable development.

Limited nature and outcome of university engagement

Prominent themes that revolved around the limited nature and outcomes of university engagement were detachment, limited Indigenous knowledge, and unequal power relations. Although a few participants alluded to some interaction between the university and the community, most participants reported that the university was detached from the community, and this view was especially pronounced among community members:

> For me, as of now, I've not seen anything physically to say the university has done in this place. [Community member]

> A member of the university has been discussing with this brother but never a time that that guy told him that this is what the university is focusing to come and do in [our village]. [Community member]

> We engage in research, mostly at PhD level…but the university itself doesn't engage in a lot of community-based research that can inform policy or influence development. [Academic]

Detachment from the community also had an impact upon the university's ability to access Indigenous knowledge within the community due to community members' suspicion of theft of their ideas, suspicion of hidden motives, not understanding the importance of research, political fear, and few if any benefits for the community. With respect to political fear, a participant reported that a researcher's choice of contact persons could make certain community members feel that their position in the community was threatened or that the researcher was aligned to a political party, and this could make such members exclude themselves from the research. However, even when community members were happy to collaborate with researchers, there were further constraints in accessing Indigenous knowledge, which include language, funding, location accessibility, distance, and time.

The adequacy of university engagement with the Indigenous community is also put into question through unequal power relations and the pervasiveness of Western empiricism. A common reference was the down-valuing of Indigenous knowledge, even by academics.

> [Indigenous practices] are all old things that we want to go away because it is a hard way, particularly in agriculture, is a hard way. I want, you know, mechanisation of new things, innovations. But the old way of doing things, no I don't support those now. I'm more of the west. [Academic]

> It will be very difficult for us to work with [the university], because they don't respect us, our knowledge. I'm not educated. So that's why they don't respect my knowledge. [Community member]

Academics' imposition of research ideas and solutions without the community's input is based on the belief that academic or scientific knowledge is sufficient and more powerful than Indigenous knowledge. Some participants reported that this imposition often results in failures such as the community's outright rejection of ideas and solutions and the ineffectiveness of imported methods or technologies, due to an incompatibility with the community's knowledge, ways of life and environment. An interviewee explains:

> We've been realizing a lot of failures, because of [not considering Indigenous knowledge]. I would explain to you one variety that we brought into this country…very high yielding [seeds]. But we did not consider the farmers' knowledge and the characters that the farmers are looking for. We took it to the farmers, but when farmers started growing it, they said it is not palatable, eventually it is not compactable. So the period of research, the money that was spent on that particular variety has gone in vain eventually. So this is why it is important, to begin with, the farmer…farmer first, farmer last. [Academic]

Yet, while some participants highlighted the value of Indigenous knowledge and had visions of its integration with mainstream or scientific knowledge, others called for more caution in accepting Indigenous knowledge for various reasons such as it being obsolete and unverified by science. These are discussed further in the ensuing section.

Sustainable outcomes of Indigenous practices

Two main themes emerged here: perceptions of Indigenous knowledge as held by participants and the sustainability of Indigenous practices and outcomes. Participants had a wide range of views on Indigenous knowledge; while some contrasted and separated it from western knowledge, others identified a complementarity between both knowledge systems. They also focused on different aspects of Indigenous knowledge:

> We are now targeting eco-friendly practices, practices that will not have much impact on the environment. So, we have to go back to the Indigenous knowledge, what farmers are practising and also research into the new knowledge. [Academic]

> We know that in Africa, some local herbs respond better to certain diseases than orthodox Western medicine. [Academic]

Despite divergent views, including mentions of harmful Indigenous practices such as female genital mutilation and incest, participants reported several Indigenous practices that are defensible, including the use of local planting techniques like intercropping, use of organic manure, communal rules that contribute to the protection of biodiversity, and emphasis on community wellbeing. These are illustrated in the following statements:

> When I visited them in their natural setting, I was made to understand that there are certain forests you don't [destroy]… these forests had been there and have served as a means of sustenance, people go there to fetch firewood, people go there to hunt, and people go there to farm, the trees are not cut, and they have been there for a very long time protecting their environment. [Academic]

> Normally, how Indigenous practices help this community is through the help people receive, especially women that are pregnant and children when they fall sick. And also, those who don't have the money to go to the hospital. [Community member]

These findings indicate that sustainability of the environment *and* human society, which are at the heart of the UN's SDGs, are also the outcomes of many Indigenous practices. These practices contribute to sustainable development by reducing hunger and poverty, using agricultural practices for increased harvest, promoting good health and wellbeing with local herbs that provide effective treatment, environmental protection through communal rules, and reducing costs and inequalities through the provision of free or low-cost healthcare by community members. Therefore, valuing the ecology of knowledges is essential for the university's collaboration with local communities towards achieving the SDGs.

Indigenising university engagement for sustainable outcomes

Three main themes emerged as possibilities for Indigenising university engagement to have sustainable outcomes. These are building trust, community-university alliances, and Indigenised practices. The majority of academics looked to a building of trust with the community through respectful listening, communicating, involvement and immersion in their social activities:

> But the point is that trust and confidence must exist between you and them. Basically, [their knowledge] is intellectual property. They have their knowledge and then you need their knowledge. So, you have to work with them to acquire that knowledge. [Academic]

> The best way of accessing these knowledge systems is to go into the community and blend in. Don't go in and feel superior, be open-minded, do not challenge the knowledge that is being given to you because that's their knowledge. Receive whatever is given to you with an open mind. [Academic]

The need for the university to engage with the community was also mentioned by several participants, especially through the co-creation of knowledge and technologies and the latter's joint implementation. Participants considered that engaging Indigenous knowledge holders could lead to university members' acceptance and application of their knowledge system and any activities built upon it. For example:

> The moment we start talking to each other, we will certainly be able to find a solution that belongs to all of us. And when a solution belongs to all of us, it is not imposed on anyone, there's a tendency that we are going to succeed. (Academic]

> We can work with the university. Because we will know something that the university doesn't know, and the university will know something that we don't know…it's just about sharing knowledge. [Community member]

In addition, most participants understood that Indigenous knowledge deserves to be incorporated in research with the community, the university's curriculum (what is to be taught),

and the university's pedagogy (how it is to be taught). For example, some academics discussed their adaptation of classroom activities to engage Indigenous knowledge:

> As a lecturer, you try to bring that knowledge that you want to impact to your students in their cultural context and teaching whatsoever course you are teaching and drawing parallels with the existing cultural context. [Academic]

> There was a time I proposed the idea of bringing the study of Indigenous culture into our curriculum, especially in my field of sociology. We have a lot to read, we have a lot to learn from that area. Basing everything on the Western system of knowledge hardly contribute to our understanding. What we can only do is borrow the knowledge, contextualize it to our situation [Academic]

However, some participants had opinions that questioned the knowledgeability of Indigenous people and the value of Indigenous knowledge. This was also found among the community members. For example, when asked if the university can partner with the community for curriculum development and if Indigenous knowledge can inform the curriculum, some responses were:

> That will not be easy... Because [community members] may not have an idea. But the little things that they know you can incorporate; you can incorporate within your curriculum. [Academic]

> How can university learn from me? I am not educated. How will I teach the university my knowledge? …I normally will transfer this knowledge to my children. [Community member]

In sum, building trust with community members, engaging equitable community-university alliances, and incorporating Indigenous knowledge in research are avenues for Indigenising university engagement. Even though many participants highlighted *epistemic reciprocity* – learning from each other – as an important component for Indigenising university engagement for sustainable outcomes, a few participants held the view that community members have limited knowledge as portrayed in the above quotes from an academic and a community member. This points to the need for more interactions between the university and community members for an appreciation of the limits and possibilities of the diverse knowledge systems.

Discussion

Drawing on this study's findings, it is evident that, at present, university engagement at The University of the Gambia is unduly limited due to the *epistemic divide* between the university and the community in the knowledges that each party produces. Although many participants described the importance of integrating IKSs in academia and establishing improved university-community alliances, a few participants considered IKSs to have lesser value than the scientific knowledge system. This phenomenon, also referred to as colonial mentality – the belief that the cultural values of the coloniser are inherently superior to one's own (David & Okazaki, 2010; Fanon, 1963) – has also been reported by other researchers (Nnam, 2007;

Adebisi, 2016). However, the recent defeat of the former president who was a self-proclaimed traditional healer could have resulted in the University members' cautious engagement with Indigenous knowledge in their practice.

Hence, as discussed earlier, there is a need to create spaces for IKSs in universities to increase awareness of their value, unravel the systematic power relations, and decentre western knowledge (Dei, 2014; de Sousa Santos, 2014). IKSs' incorporation in academia could be achieved through collective support and recognition of research with local communities that builds relationships and conceives shared ideas. Furthermore, local communities need to be approached using their ethical standards and cultural protocols and these could free up safe spaces for the wider community and civic engagement (Bird-Naytowhow et al., 2017). These ways of working can ultimately lead to the realisation of the Indigenised university, characterised by respectfulness, joint participation, community orientation, mutualism, and inclusivity.

Community members are willing to work with universities to advance their developmental needs if trust is established, and researchers need to strengthen the reciprocal knowledge transfer between universities and Indigenous communities. In this light, collaborative research should recognise and capture the knowledges of Indigenous peoples and researchers, from the design to implementation phases. No assumption is made here about epistemological equivalence among the knowledge systems, but within an ecology of knowledges (de Sousa Santos, 2014), research collaborators can consider all available insights without bias and work with the most viable or relevant knowledge to their projects – or embrace epistemic hybridity, where necessary. Indigenous knowledge holders as community members could be invited into the university's learning spaces to share relevant knowledge with students and academics, and university students and academics could also go into the communities to share relevant knowledge too within a symbiotic context.

However, adequate university-community engagement, and community-based research, in particular, could be difficult to achieve for many universities. The present case study itself faced logistical challenges of collaborative research, especially with respect to funds, time, and road accessibility. Nevertheless, as universities in sub-Saharan Africa work towards institutional reforms, modifications that individual academics are making are vital and could have a catalytic effect towards the necessary transformation. These modifications include the use of participatory research methodologies with Indigenous communities, drawing parallels

with the local cultural context during lectures to make curricula more relevant to students, and employing Indigenous knowledge transfer methods such as storytelling and music.

There are possibilities, therefore, for the Indigenised university for sustainable development to emerge. Deliberate creation of opportunities to capture the opinions of Indigenous knowledge holders, especially because their voices tend to be marginalised within the university (Bunda, Zipin, & Brennan, 2012; Mamdani, 2016; Shava & Nkopodi, 2020), is fundamental to the Indigenised university. Essentially, the Indigenised university contributes to the eradication of epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988; hooks, 1990) by creating alliances that empower Indigenous communities and their members to contribute to the processes embedded in a university's mission towards sustainable development

Conclusion

Ideas for an Indigenised university for sustainable development have been presented in this paper, based on a case study in sub-Saharan Africa. Indigenous peoples are found all over the world, and by extension, any university with a development-oriented mission can assume an Indigenised form. This is important because Indigenous knowledge holders have long been unequal or absent participants in knowledge production, utilisation and implementation processes and it is timely for such knowledge to be integrated into academia for relatable and sustainable outcomes.

However, a necessary condition of any successful community-based research is that of the equitable participation of all relevant parties in processes free from hegemonic tendencies, so that the venture is emancipatory. This is important because our findings point to community engagement as a potential platform for knowledge democracy and the unravelling of epistemic violence. Furthermore, democratic participation of Indigenous and academic communities in the architecture of sustainable development is necessary because people have to develop themselves; they cannot be liberated or developed by other people (Nyerere, 1978). Therefore, the idea of the Indigenised university for sustainable development can be engendered by the intended beneficiaries of development outcomes, driving change processes, by taking hold of mechanisms that can realise their goals. In this light, the elements of respect, participation, community orientation, mutuality, and inclusivity that characterised the Indigenised university can be evident. Particular implications of the Indigenised university for sustainable development include narrowing of power gaps between the university and Indigenous communities, empowering Indigenous communities to participate in driving the realisation of

university-community engagement for sustainable development in their settings, and achieving mutually beneficial objectives.

The study that underpins this paper is significant in a number of ways: i) a contribution to the literature on ways of connecting Indigenous communities with universities, and to a conceptualisation of the Indigenised university, ii) a provision of insights into the connectivity between university-community engagement, Indigenous knowledge systems and sustainable development, iii) the creation of a context for subsequent studies on practical steps that universities might take in the direction of epistemic justice and sustainable development for all, and iv) heightening the intractability of theoretical and philosophical issues of epistemology, knowledge ecology, and epistemological justice, as they reveal themselves in practice, in complex situations.

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