

Informal Welfare responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in Africa: Reflecting on Black African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (BAIKS)

Presented by: Dr Chance Chagunda

Country Manager at the Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative (WPDI) and Research Associate, at the Southern African Policy and Development Nexus (SAPDN)

Presented at the 2024 Social Policy in Africa Conference 15-17 April 2024, Tshwane, South Africa



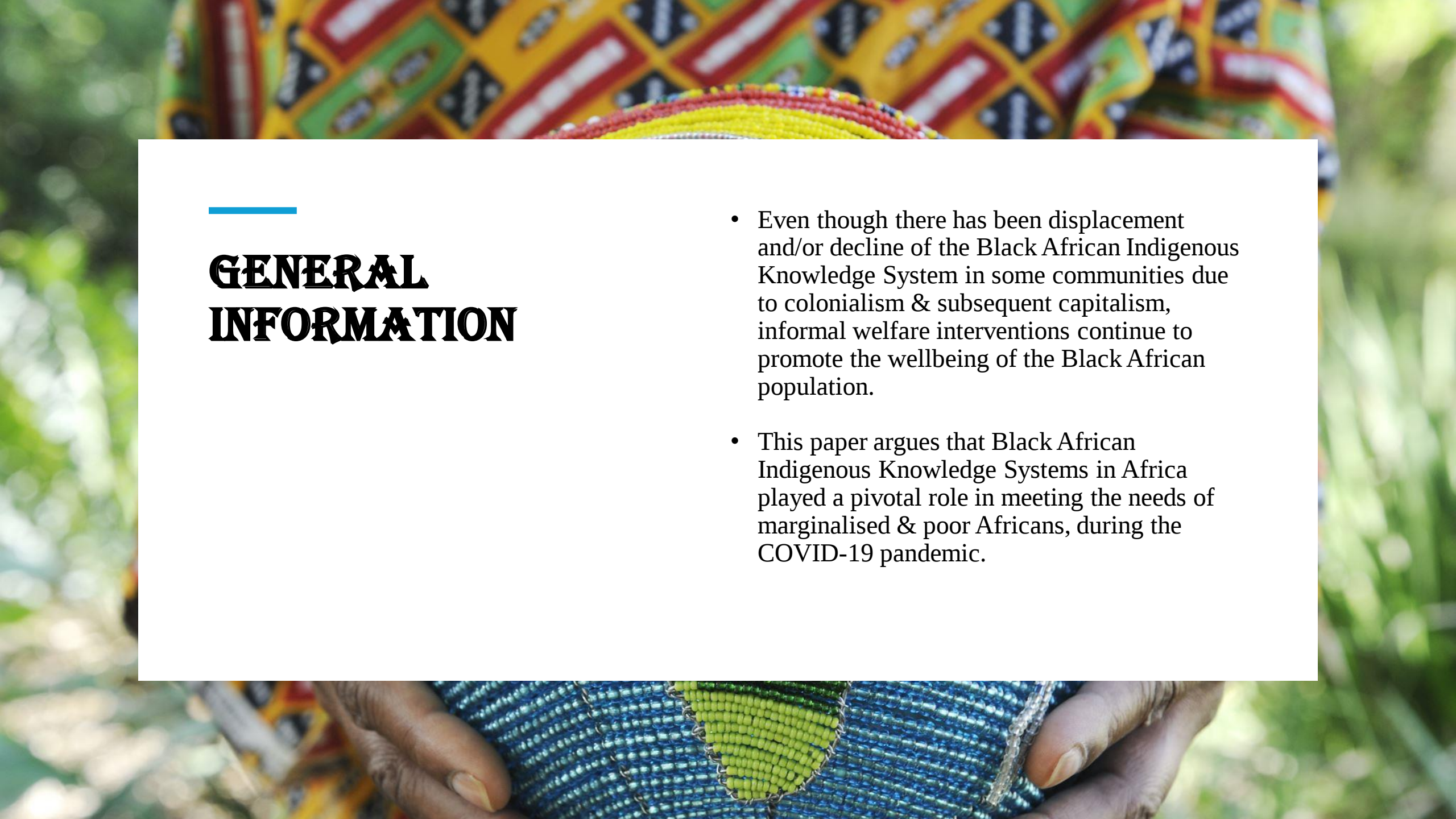
GENERAL INFORMATION

- From time immemorial, the world has faced various challenges including pandemics that communities from all corners of the earth have used knowledge to find solutions to such problems.
- Knowledge in its totality is diverse & has always belonged to the communities in their own contextual world views.
- It is through this knowledge that has enabled communities to actively participate in finding solutions to various challenges even using informal welfare responses.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

- Western & indigenous thinkers including academics have been in the forefront in search for answers to the global & local challenges that negate the wellbeing of people.
- The author argues that all knowledge systems play an important part in the lives of the people concerned including the Black African Indigenous Knowledge System
- Just like other continents, the African Continent possesses knowledge systems that are indigenous to it and very critical in boosting a holistic wellbeing of its citizens (Chagunda, 2021).



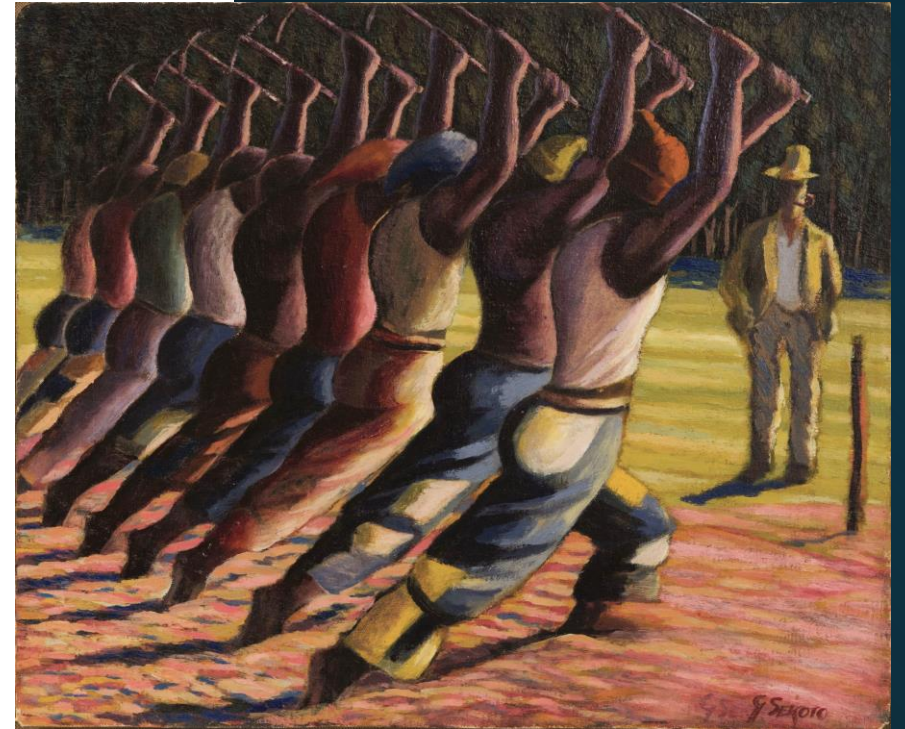


GENERAL INFORMATION

- Even though there has been displacement and/or decline of the Black African Indigenous Knowledge System in some communities due to colonialism & subsequent capitalism, informal welfare interventions continue to promote the wellbeing of the Black African population.
- This paper argues that Black African Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Africa played a pivotal role in meeting the needs of marginalised & poor Africans, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- With the help of Black African Intellectuals namely, Thandika Mkandawire, Jimi Adesina and Ndangwa Noyoo, the author has chosen Chilimba & Humanism in Zambia, Susu in Ghana, Stokvels in South Africa, Ujamaa in Tanzania and Umunthuism in Malawi as part of Black African Knowledge System to demonstrate that indigenous welfare system has transformative characteristics that played & continues to play a positive part in improving the welfare of people.



SOCIAL ILLS AND CHALLENGES

Poverty that include a shortfall in income and a shortfall in capabilities that include inability to have a nutritious meal, access to health care, clean water, and gainful employment (Sen, 1999).

Unemployment, Hunger and starvation,

Sicknesses

Pandemics, Inequality

Ignorance of rights and entitlements,

inaccessible systems of justice,

deprivations in socioeconomic conditions, widespread insecurity, Armed conflict, Persistent neglect of children and women and

the violations of people's rights

What constitutes full human live?

Nussbaum's (2004) answers this question as she says, what constitutes full human live is based on dignity and needs.



She says that humanity is under a collective obligation to provide certain needs for people to live full human lives.



In determining the prerequisites for living a life that is fully human rather than subhuman, a life worthy of the dignity of the human being includes the need to live co-operatively with others.



She stresses that a fundamental part of the good community is where human beings co-operate together for the fulfilment of human needs and the realization of fully human lives.

DEFINING SOCIAL POLICY



The establishment of the discipline of social policy came from the politics of collectivism and the practice of state intervention to deal with social problems (Williams, 1989).



There is no single, universally accepted definition of 'social policy', even academics do not agree among themselves.



According to Gil (1992), many writers on social policy do not define the term at all thereby assuming that 'it conveys the same meaning to every reader, and it therefore requires no definition'.

DEFINING SOCIAL POLICY



Social policy is an intricate subject area, which requires particular expertise (Ginsberg, 1994) and that is partly why we are here in this Conference.



According to Alcock et al. (2008) social policy refers both to the activity of policy-making to promote well-being and to the academic study of such actions.



Marshall (1965) defines social policy as the policy of governments with regard to action having a direct impact on the welfare of the citizens by providing them with services or income.



Jones (1985) understands social policy as representing an attempt to interfere and by some criteria to improve or correct a given social order

TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL POLICY

- Noyoo (2010; 2019) argues that Social policy is supposed to be understood as an instrument which actors (state and non-state), can employ to meet the needs of the people and ideally help to give birth to the good community/society.
- It is in this spirit that social policy cannot achieve the former if it does not have inherent transformative qualities and therefore, must be seen as a dynamic vehicle for societal transformation.

TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL POLICY

- Some African intelligentsias contents that social policy has to be transformative in nature so that its outcomes whether it is production, protection, reproduction, re-distribution, and social cohesion or nation-building, transforms communities for the better. The transformative social policy apparatuses range from education to health-care, agrarian reform, child-care, old-age care, and to fiscal instruments. The outcomes, themselves, go on to emphasize and scoop out the normative framework of the social policy regime (Adesina, 2010).

TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL POLICY

- Social policy involves social welfare, social institutions and social relations.
- It involves all-embracing concerns with redistribution, production, reproduction and protection, and works in tandem with economic policy in pursuit of national social and economic goals. Social policy does not merely deal with the “causalities” of social changes and processes; it is also a contribution to the welfare of society as a whole.
- But most elements of social policy are explicit, such as direct government provision of social welfare through, for example, broad-based education and health services, subsidies and benefits, social security and pensions, labour market interventions, land reform, progressive taxation and other redistributive policies (Mkandawire 2006:1).

THEORETICAL PREMISES

Social policy should be considered as a tool which nations or other institutions can deploy to meet the needs of human beings so as assist in giving birth to the good community.



Social policy ought to have an inherent transformative power in order to produce a good community.



Social policy has to be intertwined with the political economy of a concerned nation and as such follow a symbiotic relationship in as far as political and economic processes are concerned to have a positive impact on a community.

BLACK AFRICAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Black African Indigenous Knowledge System played a pivotal role in the settling of disputes and enforcement of justice during the Covid-19 (Asogwa & Onwuama, 2022).

People that live in cities and towns moved to rural areas to be with their communities for social cohesion and solidarity (Barney & Chagunda, 2023).

Black African Indigenous Knowledge System helped to remedy COVID-19 pandemic even though these interventions have not been recognized at global level scientifically (Shumba, Nyangari, & Mpofu, 2022).

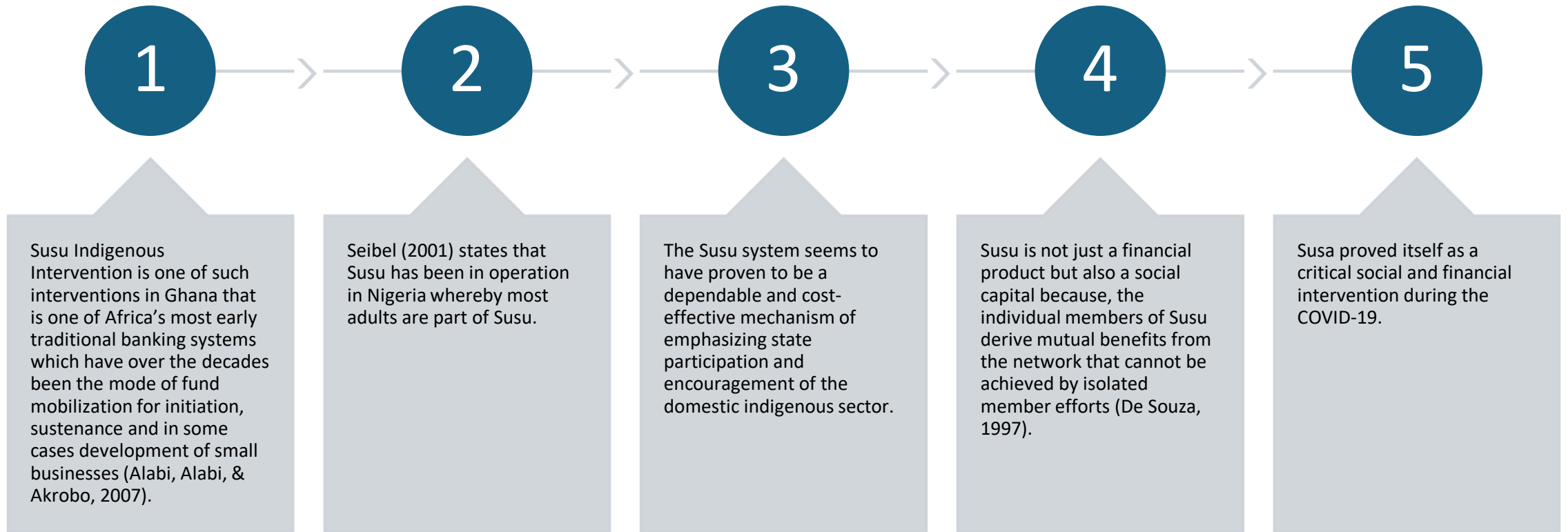
BLACK AFRICAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- Some participants stated that their clients depended on their relatives to have food on the table that means families supported each other (Barney & Chagunda, 2023). .
- Black Africans trekked to the rural areas to be with their immediate and extended families just before the national lockdown (Barney & Chagunda, 2023). .
- Likewise foreign Africans employed in South Africa from neighbouring countries, travelled back to their countries of origin to be with their families before the COVID-19 national lockdown for solidarity and support (Barney & Chagunda, 2023).
- A significant number of participants in the research mentioned that many Black Africans had to travel to their rural areas as it was easy to find and use indigenous medicine especially for diseases such as COVID-19 (Barney & Chagunda, 2023). .

CHILIMBA INDIGENOUS INTERVENTION

- Chilimba Indigenous Intervention in Zambia plays a critical role in rural people's living standard.
- Smatfin (2020) states that the term, 'Chilimba' refers to a group/community saving and investment where each member contributes a fixed daily, weekly or monthly sum of money.
- Rainz (2023) positions that Chilimba is a scheme where more people create a money pool and contributions are paid as agreed and at intervals, the group pay each other and when it comes to new members, they are able to join after a complete cycle.
- Chilimba helped direct and indirect community members affected by COVID-19 during and after the pandemic as they were able to put food on the table, access medical care and transportation (Mutale, 2023).

SUSA INDIGENOUS INTERVENTION



- Stokvels Indigenous Intervention in South Africa just like Susu and Chilimba, is a form of communal savings scheme or investment that plays as a foundation stone of community-based savings for decades (Barter, 2024) and Mduduzi & Khumalo, 2019).
- Stokvels currently run as savings stokvels, burial stokvels, grocery stokvels, birthday-party stokvels, and investment clubs boost people's wellbeing.
- Stokvels are an informal self-help unification of people with a shared goal of pooling the resources together on a regular basis to deal with a shared need due to poverty, joblessness, and income security (Matuku & Kaseke, 2014).
- Stokvels have improved the people's standard of living and during COVID-19, it came handy in providing needed income to many households that formed part of Stokvels (Barter, 2024) .

STOKVELS INDIGENOUS INTERVENTION

HUMANISM

Zambia became independent on 24 October 1964 and its first president was Kenneth Kaunda.



During colonial rule, United National Independence Party was forceful in advocating an egalitarian and non-racial society premised on African values.



The new Zambia so to speak promulgated policies and programmes that attempted to erase the inherited legacy of colonialism which was mainly defined by the inequities and inequalities of the colonial era to plan to the transformation of the new society and it was also linked to the social welfare policy of Zambia.

HUMANISM

- The new Zambia raised the standard of living, achieving a more equitable distribution of wealth, humanising social security such as free health services and expanded educational facilities and developed agriculture in the interest of the people (Tordoff and Molteno, 1974).
- Zambia's development trajectory was underpinned by an ideology, known as Humanism which was used as a tool to mobilise the citizens around the nation-building and socio-economic development (Kaunda, 1966).

UMUNTHUISM

- Umunthu in Malawi & Zambia just like Ubuntu in South Africa & Swaziland just to mention a few countries is a word derived from the Bantu languages and it means humanness (Etieyibo, 2017& Chagunda, 2021).
- In a Black African Community generally speaking, umunthuism refers to the interconnectedness, mutual responsibility of an individual with the community and the nature of embeddedness.
- I argue that umunthuism is part of Black African Indigenous Knowledge System that enables the indigenous social policy implementation in an effort of contributing to the wellbeing of human beings (Chagunda, 2023).
- Due to umunthuism, local communities had helped each other to access medical care, housing, food security, burial services and education just to mention a few (Bolt, 2016).

UMUNTHUISM

- On the African continent, immediately after independence some countries such as Tanzania (Ujamaa), Zambia (Humanism) & Malawi (umunthuism) included in their national plan & according to Scarritt (1971) govts-built schools, clinics and provided their citizens with services that nurtured a cooperative relationship with the economy (Kaunda, 1966; Nyerere, 1966; Chagunda, 2023).
- Umunthuism contributes in ending poverty in all its forms, achieving food security, improving access to medical care, opening access to assets and resources (Chagunda, 2021; United Nations, 2016 & 2022).
- Noyoo and Matela (2024) critically state that extended family unit in Africa which is central to Umunthuism plays a fundamental role in indigenous welfare system.

- Umunthuism has been part of African education, passed orally from generation to generation and as such knowledge is what an individual acquires throughout one's life
- Education plays a critical role in transferring the Umunthuism values (Letseka, 2000).
- Within Umunthuism one finds various characteristics such as “caring, humility, thoughtful, considerate, understanding, wise, generous, hospitable, socially mature, socially sensitive, virtuous and blessed” (Le Roux, 2000:43).
- Umunthuism by design is supposed to promote the common good of family and community (Chagunda, 2021)
- Within Traditional Authorities in Malawi one still finds traditional institutions that look after the orphans, the elderly, the sick and the disabled. They do this with their limited available resources.

COVID-19 TRADITIONAL REMEDIES

- In most communities in rural areas Traditional Herbal Practitioners prepared and shared indigenous concoction of various herbs for the extended family members in 2020/21 during COVID-19
- In some communities in rural areas such concoction was shared in the broader rural communities
- Just like when people get bitten by snakes treat themselves and hardly takes anyone to the mission or government hospitals, rural people treated themselves during COVID-19.
- Even when there were lockdowns in Malawi, in rural communities such regulations were hardly observed but there were not many cases reported for COVID-19 if any.
- It has been documented that Black African Knowledge system including traditional medicine has been side-lined in favour of mainstream Western Science and knowledge and sometimes this is done by Black African academics educated within Western Education (Communique, 1993).
- There is a serious need to research, recognize, publish and integrate Traditional Black African interventions as argued by Domfeh (2007).

MODERNIZE THEM OR CREATE ROOM FOR THEM

- There is a need to change our mind set for Black African Knowledge System
- It is necessary to slowly start putting Black African Medical Responses on the same or similar level with medical responses
- Various African interventions such as Chilimba, Susu, Stokvel and Umunthuism and others have to be modernized or accepted as such (Barter, 2024; Mduduzi & Khumalo, 2019).
- Black African Leadership should adopt and integrate Black African Indigenous Interventions into their policies and strategic plans (Domfeh, 2007).
- Increase partnership between research institutes, government and Black African Indigenous institutions to test and package properly including storage of Traditional Black African medicine.

PRINCIPLES OF UMUNTHUISM VS TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL POLICY

- The principles of Black African Knowledge System such as umunthuism are in line with those of transformative social policy as briefly indicated above.
- Umunthuism contains home-grown transformative interventions capable of developing the African continent.
- Umunthuism is making inroads into healthcare, food security, nutrition, and others so it is beneficial for the African continent to boost creativity and harnessing of Black African Knowledge System.
- Therefore, transformative social policy and Black African Indigenous Knowledge Systems are key in raising the quality of life of Africans in this regard.
- Instead of undermining or side lining Black African Knowledge System, African Leadership and Academics should find ways of adding value to such knowledge system through scientific innovation (Horak, 2005).
- Currently, there is limited and in some situations, no funding to conduct research within the Black African Knowledge System and as such the African continent will continue to rely on Western Knowledge System even though Africa has its own resource to transform its own citizenry.

SOME CONSULTED SOURCES

- Adesina, J. O., 2010, Rethinking the Social Protection Paradigm: Social Policy in Africa's Development, Paper presented at the Conference on Promoting Resilience through Social Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa, Dakar, Senegal.
- Alabi, G., Alabi, J., and Akrobo, S. T., 2007, The Role of Susu: A Traditional Informal Banking System in The Development of Micro and Small-Scale Enterprises (MSEs) In Ghana. *International Business & Economics Research Journal (IBER)*, 6(12)
- Alcock, P., May, M. and Rowlingson, K., 2008, The Subject of Social Policy, in Alcock, P., May, M. and Rowlingson, K., eds, *The Student's Companion to Social Policy*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 1-3.
- Asogwa, N. U., and Onwuama, M. E., 2022, African indigenous knowledge systems and the quest for scientifico-technological development: the neglected dimension. *Journal of African Studies*, 23(1), 7
- Barney, R. J., and Chagunda, C., 2023, Food insecurity and social capital during COVID-19: A cross-national qualitative study of communities from South Africa and the United States. *International Social Work*. 0(0).
- Barter, H., 2024, Understanding Stokvels in South Africa: A Legal Perspective. Available at: <https://www.bartermckellar.law/banking-financial-law-explained/understanding-stokvels-in-south-africa-a-legal-perspective>
- Bolt, J., and Gardner, L., 2016, De-Compressing History? Pre-Colonial Institutions and Local Government Finance in British Colonial Africa. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/68766736/De_Compressing_History_Pre_Colonial_Institutions_and_Local_Government_Finance_in_British_Colonial_Africa
- Chagunda, C., 2023, The Policy Challenges of Africa's Changing Demography and Social Structures. In D. Besharov, N. Gilbert, & K. J. Baehler (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Governance and Public Management for Social Policy* (pp. 39–52). Accra: Labour Research & Policy Institute.
- Chagunda, C., 2021, Development Aid, Democracy and Sustainable Development in Malawi – 1964 to date in Noyoo, N.; Neto, P.F & Sanches, E. *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*.

SOME CONSULTED SOURCES

- Communique, R., 1993, Endod: A case study of the use of African indigenous knowledge. *Third World Resurgence*, 33: 9-10.
- Domfeh, K. A., 2007, Indigenous knowledge systems and the need for policy and institutional reforms. *Tribes and Tribals, Special Volume*, 1: 41-52
- De Souza, B. X., 1997, Social Capital and the cities: advice to change agents. *National Civic Review*, 86 (2, summer), 111- 118
- Etieyibo, E., 2017, Ubuntu and the Environment. In: Afolayan A., Falola T. *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Gil, D. G., 1992, *Unravelling Social Policy*. Rochester, Vermont: Schenkman Books
- Ginsberg, L., 1994, *Understanding Social Problems, Policies, and Programmes*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina.
- Horak, M., 2005, Adding value to indigenous knowledge through scientific innovation. Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/afr/ik/GRA/horak.pdf>
- Jones, C., 1985, *Patterns of Social Policy*. London: Tavistock.
- Kaunda, K.D. 1966, *A humanist in Africa*. London: Longmans.
- Letseka, M., 2000, African philosophy and educational discourse. In P. Higgs, N. C. G. Vakalisa, T. V. Mda, & N. T. Assie-Lumumba (Eds.), *African voices in education* (pp. 179-193). Cape Town: Juta
- Le Roux, J., 2000, The concept of ‘Umunthu’: Africa’s most important contribution to multicultural education? *Multicultural Teaching*, 18(2), 43–46
- Marshall, T. H., 1965, *Social Policy*. London: Hutchinson. Lansdowne
- Matuku, S., and Kaseke, E., 2014, The role of stokvels in improving people’s lives: The case in Orange Farm, Johannesburg, South Africa. *Social Work*, 50(4), 504-515
- Mduduzi J.K. B. and Khumalo, N., 2019, The role of stokvels in South Africa: a case of economic transformation of a municipality. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 17(4), 26-37. doi:10.21511/ppm.17(4).
- Mkandawire, T., 2006, Targeting and Universalism in Poverty Reduction (Social Policy and Development Paper No. 23), Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD).

SOME CONSULTED SOURCES

- Noyoo, N., Matela, M., 2024, Exploring the Situation of the Family in South Africa During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic. In: Weimann-Sandig, N., Lutz, R. (eds) *Family Dynamics, Gender and Social Inequality During COVID-19*. Springer, Cham.
- Noyoo, N., 2019, *Social Policy in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Social Re-engineering for Inclusive Development* (1st ed.), Oxon: Routledge.
- Noyoo, N., 2010, *Social Policy and Human Development in Zambia*, London: Adonis & Abbey.
- Nussbaum, M., 2003, *Woman and Human Development, The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Nyerere, J., 1966, *Ujamaa: Essays in Socialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- United Nations (UN), (2022). Sustainable Development Goals. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change/>
- United Nations, 2016, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/Sustainable Development Goals/report/2016/The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20Report%202016.pdf>
- Rainz, K., 2023, Chilimba and Village Banking in Zambia. Available from: <https://keithrainz.me/chilimba-and-village-banking-in-zambia/>
- Scarritt, R. J., 1971, Elite values, ideology, and power in post-independence Zambia. *African Studies Journal*. 14(1): 31-54. DOI: 10.2307/523610.
- Shumba, S., Nyangari, E., Mpofu, M., 2022, African Indigenous Knowledge and the Management of COVID-19 Pandemic. In: Masaka, D. (eds) *Knowledge Production and the Search for Epistemic Liberation in Africa*. Springer, Cham.
- Sen, A., 1999, *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press: New York.
- Smatfin., 2020, What you need to know about Chilimba. Available at: <https://smatfin.com/what-you-need-to-know-about-chilimba/>
- Tordoff, W., and Molteno, R., 1974, *Politics in Zambia*. University of California Press.
- Williams, F., 1989, *Social Policy: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.