

## Research Article

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# Indigenous Standpoint Theory: ethical principles and practices for studying Sukuma people in Tanzania

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## Abstract

Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) is yet to be widely applied in guiding the conduct of research that involves Indigenous people in Africa. In reference to Tanzania, this approach is new. There has been no study in the context of Tanzania which has used IST, despite the presence of many Indigenous people in the country. IST is widely used in Australia, New Zealand and Canada to guide the conduct of research when studying Indigenous people. In this paper, I show how I developed nine ethical protocols for conducting culturally, respectful and safe research with the Sukuma people in Tanzania and how I used those protocols within a research project on girls and secondary education in rural Tanzania. By developing these protocols, a significant new contribution to the area of IST in Tanzania and Africa in general has been established. These protocols may serve as a starting reference point for other future researchers in Tanzania if they apply IST in their research such that the voices of Indigenous people may be heard, and the community has a greater degree of control and input in the planning and designing of the project, as well as the analysis and dissemination of the information.

## Introduction

Culturally safe and respectful research is necessary in obtaining findings that function appropriately to improve the lives of a researched community (Ntseane, 2011; Stoffer, 2017). As such, in an effort to liberate Indigenous communities, indigenous ways of knowing that are culturally specific must be emphasised. Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) emphasises culturally responsive and respectful research. In the past, the conduct of research has been dominated by Western-oriented methodologies. The voices of Indigenous people in many parts of the world has either been sidelined or suppressed, because the methods that uphold indigenous knowledge, values and principles have frequently been ignored (Mkabela, 2005; Owusu-Ansah and Mji, 2013). It has been argued that in Africa and elsewhere in the world, Western tools, concepts and methodologies were introduced during the colonial eras and were maintained in the post-colonial era (Chilisa, 2005; Mkabela, 2005). According to Smith (2012, p. 1), the word research is 'inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism'. Smith further explains that 'the word research itself is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary' (Smith, 2012, p. 1). It is from this view that IST emerged to challenge the use of Eurocentric Western research methodologies in research that involves Indigenous people.

Western research methodologies, according to researchers with an indigenous focus, have the following limitations. First, Western research methods are characterised by relations of dominance in the sense that the researcher controls and dominates the whole process of research (Coram, 2011). Second, Western methods place the researcher in the 'upper' position as an 'expert' while community members at the lower position as only 'informants' (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012; Braun *et al.*, 2013). Third, Western methods are regarded as individualist in nature as they may primarily benefit the researcher rather than the community in which the research is conducted (Hart, 2010; Chilisa, 2012). Fourth, Western methods are biased and not applicable to all, as they are guided by 'assumptions and theories that mostly neglect context dynamics in which meanings emerge, and within which they continue to exist' (Roos, 2008, p. 661). Fifth, Western methods of inquiry are regarded as insensitive, unfair and antagonistic to the values and principles which guide indigenous ways of knowing where reality is grounded in the spirit of equality, community and shared identity (Hart, 2010; Coram, 2011).

Essentially, Indigenous researchers are not suggesting new research methods, but rather arguing for the re-positioning of Indigenous people in the entire research process. In fact, they advocate for Indigenous people to be actively involved in the whole research process as 'knowers' rather than as 'informants', including participation in the identification of research

questions, collection of information, analysis and interpretation of the information, writing and ownership of the report and dissemination of the findings (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Hart, 2010; Braun *et al.*, 2013; Olsen, 2017). This means that research participants and researchers should work in collaboration, and that everyone has something valuable to contribute to the research process. The investigator does not enter the indigenous society as a knowledgeable person, but as someone who, in collaboration with the members of the society, co-construct reality (Mkabela, 2005; Roos, 2008).

In addition, IST aims to challenge researchers to use alternative methods of investigation that are culturally specific and safe, sensitive, relevant and draw from indigenous knowledge. The main argument of Indigenous researchers is that people need to be understood within their social, political, cultural and historical contexts (Mkabela, 2005; Louis, 2007; Braun *et al.*, 2013; Stoffer, 2017). This is because contexts and cultures may differ between ethnic groups, nationalities, regions or locations. As such there is no one method of inquiry that is universal. All ways of knowing arising from different cultures need to be honoured, valued and respected in their uniqueness (Kovach, 2009; Braun *et al.*, 2013; Owusu-Ansah and Mji, 2013). This respect of diversity in culture and contexts should not be viewed negatively as a fragmentation of knowledge, but rather as a way of giving a voice to all people regardless of their colour, race, location, class, gender, religion, age and tribe (Chilisa, 2012).

Furthermore, IST upholds collective, communal or togetherness ways of gathering information rather than individualistic ones (Mkabela, 2005; Hart, 2010). It is from this cooperation and connectedness that reality can be understood, and knowledge can be constructed. As noted above, the approach in indigenous theory is collaborative, giving a chance for community members to participate and provide their inputs during all stages of the research process (Mkabela, 2005; Hart, 2010; Smith, 2012). In addition, IST wants the research project to benefit the society in which the research takes place (Louis, 2007; Hart, 2010; Smith, 2012).

Lastly, IST advocates the view which insists that only Indigenous people possess the right to conduct research with and about Indigenous people (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). For example, only black have the right to research black and only white can research white. This view stems from the fact that a non-Indigenous researcher has not been socialised in the indigenous group and therefore possesses little or no experience of indigenous life, hence he/she cannot comprehend the complexities of the group at the same level as an Indigenous researcher (Foley, 2003, p. 46). However, some other interpretations of IST argue that it is possible for non-Indigenous people to carry out research, but ideally it would be in partnership with Indigenous researchers, or it would be led by Indigenous researchers (Louis, 2007; Olsen, 2017). It really depends on the relationship one has developed with a particular community. If the researcher is a known person, Indigenous people can work with him or her, because the most important factor is trust in the research relationship. However, unequal power in structures/relationships may prevent genuine choices being made by locals. Also, what is required for researchers is to be committed to 'build[ing] harmony among the communities they study, to reciprocate by giving back to communities for what they take, and to strive for truth, justice, fairness, and inclusiveness in the construction of knowledge' (Chilisa, 2012, p. 188).

## African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS)

It is also important to briefly explain the notions underlying African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) to see how it complements or contradicts IST. Indigenous knowledge or African indigenous knowledge, here used synonymously, has been defined differently by different scholars. Matsika (2012) defined indigenous knowledge 'as the traditional and local knowledge that exists and is developed through the experiences of the local community in the process of managing the conditions or context that challenge the people's everyday life' (pp. 209–210). According to Mafongoya and Ajayi (2017), indigenous knowledge refers to 'knowledge and know-how that is accumulated over generations and guides human societies in their innumerable interactions with their surrounding environment' (p. 17). Mapara (2009) on the other hand defined indigenous knowledge as 'a body of knowledge, or bodies of knowledge of the indigenous people of particular geographical areas that they have survived on for a very long time' (p. 140). Central to these definitions is the recognition that indigenous knowledge is exclusive to a specific culture, society, location, territory or group of people and is acquired by Indigenous people through experiences and interaction with their environment. This understanding of African indigenous knowledge is further expanded when looking at some of the characteristics of African indigenous knowledge.

African indigenous knowledge has the following characteristics: first, African indigenous knowledge is local (Choy and Woodlock, 2007). It is linked to a specific location or area and is produced and learned by local people living in those areas through their experiences, observation of local conditions and interaction with nature in their everyday life (Choy and Woodlock, 2007; Hart, 2010; Botha, 2011). Senanayake (2006) warns that any efforts to transfer indigenous knowledge to other locations are to dislocate it. Second, African indigenous knowledge is by nature oral, meaning that it is communicated orally and passed on from generation to generation through imitation and demonstration (Kovach, 2010; Owusu-Ansah and Mji, 2013). Therefore, to write it down is to alter some of its unique features, becoming another way to dislocate it (Senanayake, 2006). Third, it is stored in peoples' memories and is conveyed in local language, stories, dances, myths, rituals, artefacts, proverbs, riddles, music, songs and folktales (Senanayake, 2006). Fourth, the acquisition of African indigenous knowledge is collective and community oriented (Owusu-Ansah and Mji, 2013).

Fifth, African indigenous knowledge is relational, implying that it is considered in relation to something. It exists when people interact themselves with other people, the living, the nonliving, the ancestral spirits and the environment (Wane, 2005; Botha, 2011; Emeagwali, 2014). Sixth, African indigenous knowledge is a result of practical-oriented functioning and is continuously strengthened by experience and trial and error (Senanayake, 2006). Seventh, African indigenous knowledge is not static, but rather dynamic. The fact that indigenous knowledge is a result of peoples' observation and experiences in their surrounding areas, it is continuously revised as people bring new experiences and adapt external knowledge, hence change and adjust the knowledge to suit current local situations (Emeagwali, 2014). Eighth, it is possessed by all members of the society, that is, elders, men, women and children (Chilisa, 2012). Ninth, any people who have indigenous knowledge are responsible for teaching and passing on to others (Wane, 2005). Lastly, the amount and quality of knowledge that an Indigenous person holds differs based on

gender, age, social economic status, home or community roles and responsibilities and so on (Chilisa, 2012).

Having seen briefly what constitute AIKS, it is clear that IST does not contradict AIKS. IST argues that indigenous issues need to be carried out in a manner that is ethically sound and respectful from an indigenous viewpoint. In other words, IST emphasises the need to include indigenous ways of knowing in research that involve Indigenous people, and refrain from sticking to the theories and western ways of knowing advanced by colonialism. IST believe that upholding the indigenous ways of knowing will mostly lead to solutions and discoveries that can solve problems encountered by Indigenous people in Africa and around the world. In the next section, I provide a brief overview of my research project to set the context for the discussion of the ethical protocols and practices for researching Sukuma people.

### Girls and secondary education in rural Tanzania

For many years in Tanzania girls have been under-represented in secondary schools (URT, 2016). The situation in rural areas is worse (URT, 2014). National and international statistics, reports and research studies indicate that there are many girls who are not enrolled in secondary schools, and that some of those who do enrol fail to complete their studies, while the majority of those who manage to stay to the end perform poorly compared to boys in examinations (Raymond, 2014; Rwechungura, 2014; URT, 2016; Mollel and Chong, 2017). The government of Tanzania has for a long time made serious efforts to redress this situation, including the formulation of the Education and Training Policy in 1995 and 2014 to guide the provision of education at all levels of education and to ensure girls' improved participation, attendance and performance in schools. In addition to the Education and Training Policy, other initiatives taken by the government to improve girls' secondary education in both rural and urban areas include the Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP) I from 2004 to 2009 and SEDP II from 2010 to 2015.

However, despite such efforts by the government to improve the education of girls, the reforms have been disappointing and somewhat insignificant (see e.g. URT, 2016). Only low levels of progress have been made. Girls in rural areas remain deprived of full and equal opportunities for education. Boys still make up the largest population in secondary schools. Additionally, the performance in the final Form 4 examination held in 2014 and 2015 was higher for boys than girls in almost every subject except for Kiswahili (URT, 2016). It is in this context that my PhD study was conducted to explore and analyse the reasons for the girls' low enrolments, high dropout rates and poor performance in community secondary schools in rural Tanzania.

The study was conducted in Nubi village, one of the rural villages found in the Tabora region of Tanzania. This village name is a pseudonym. The native people of Nubi are Sukuma. The secondary school found in the village, referred to as Nubi secondary school in this paper, was a focus of this study. The Nubi village was purposefully chosen based on my familiarity with the area. I am a male Tanzanian citizen born and raised in the Nubi village and attended the local primary school. I belong to a Sukuma tribe. I speak Sukuma as my first language and Kiswahili and English as my second and third languages, respectively. This familiarity of the area was crucial in establishing rapport and gaining trust from the participants. Furthermore, as my village, Nubi has a very special place in my heart. In other words, I feel an important

connection with this place and, thus, I wanted to work together with the people in the village to generate knowledge about girls' education.

A total of 28 active research participants were selected from the in-school girls and boys, out-of-school girls, parents, a Headteacher, teachers, a Village Executive Officer (VEO), religious leaders and a District Education Officer. Interviews, observations, field notes, photographs and document analyses were employed as data collection methods. IST was used to guide the conduct of this study. In the next section, I discuss the ways in which IST was applied in my research project, particularly on the ways I created the ethical principles and practices for researching Sukuma people and the ways I used the protocols within my research project.

### Ethical principles and practices for researching Sukuma people

In Australia and New Zealand, Indigenous researchers and official bodies have identified research principles and practices that guide the conduct of research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Maori peoples. Such principles and practices embed and reflect indigenous ways of being or understanding social reality (ontology), ways of knowing (epistemology) and ways of doing culturally responsive and respectful research (axiology), while opposing Western ways of doing research which are grounded on individuality, objectivity, validity and discovery (Wilson, 2008, 2016; Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012). However, there are variations in the categorisation of such principles and practices in the literature available. Scholars or researchers and official research bodies have categorised them differently. For example, Smith (1999) lists seven principles which guide Maori researchers in New Zealand, such as: respect people; present yourself to people face-to-face; look, listen ... speak; share and host people, be generous; be cautious; do not trample over the mana of people and do not flaunt your knowledge.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (2012) outlines 14 principles which are grouped under six broad categories. These are: rights, respect and recognition; negotiation, consultation, agreement and mutual understanding; participation, collaboration and partnership; benefits, outcomes and giving back; managing research, use, storage and access and reporting and compliance (p. 3). The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (2003) in Australia suggests six guidelines for ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, including: reciprocity; respect; equality; responsibility; survival and protection spirit and integrity (p. 8). An African based scholar, Chilisa (2012) suggests four principles that guide the conduct of research in postcolonial indigenous societies: relational accountability; respectful representation; reciprocal appropriation and rights and regulations (p. 174). Sheehan and Walker (2001) propose principles of indigenous research as: respecting senior community members and the knowledge they hold; maintaining an equal relationship with the community; being present; listening deeply to all the voices; being a learner and fostering community learning; being real; respecting all things; engaging in cultural, environmental, historic and social relations; and a recognition that these principles are transportable to a wide range of contexts. All in all, there is an overlap and variation regarding the cultural diversity principles of indigenous research in the literature.

Researchers need to discuss and construct their own principles with the indigenous communities themselves (Wilson, 2016).

The creation of the principles which guided my research in the Sukuma community started with a careful review of the IST literature. What I found in the literature was much information about IST in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. However, an extensive search of the literature revealed no information regarding a Tanzanian theoretical perspective. I saw this as a challenge to me. How can I do culturally safe research without the ethical protocols which are relevant to the researched community? I also saw it as an opportunity to be among the first people in the country to situate my study under IST and to develop ethical guidelines for doing culturally safe research in a Tanzanian context, specifically among the Sukuma tribe.

I also was influenced by the work of Karen Martin (2008), in particular her piece titled 'Please knock before you enter: Aboriginal regulation of outsiders and the implications for researchers'. In this text, Martin develops seven protocols for doing culturally safe research with the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji peoples of Far North Queensland, Australia. I followed similar patterns, but with slight differences. Although Martin is herself a first Australian woman, she was an outsider to the Burungu People of North Queensland. Martin is a Noonuccal woman from North Stradbroke Island (south east Queensland) with Bidjara ancestry (central Queensland). Martin developed these seven protocols based on the preliminary findings of her study through talking with some Burungu people and reading about their culture. She then obtained a reality check from her own people and a member check from the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji to determine the relevance of the protocols she had framed by presenting them to some key people and speaking at a community organisations meeting. My Sukuma background helped me develop the protocols to guide my study for the Tanzanian context.

It is also evident in the literature that Indigenous researchers from Africa could adapt theoretical approaches and methodologies from the literature and knowledge archives of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples from the rest of the world, but with cultural sensitivity towards the researched society (Sheehan and Walker, 2001). The community that I examined in Tanzania is inhabited by the Sukuma Indigenous people who have some unifying cultural lifestyles with their fellow indigenous nations in Australia and New Zealand (Hussein and Armitage, 2014). I therefore adapted eight ethical protocols from the principles that guide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Maori research in Australia and New Zealand, respectively. These protocols include collaborative approach; reciprocity; respect; deep listening; equality; responsibility and accountability; survival and protection and face-to-face interaction. These guidelines do not fall into any categorisation, as suggested by different scholars and research bodies above, but were purposefully chosen based on my familiarity of the Sukuma culture and through reading and talking to some other Sukuma people. These guidelines guided me in the conception, design and conduct of my research project and were intended to be discussed with the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) of Tabora region, the District Executive Director (DED) of the studied district and the VEO of Nubi village as I sought their permission to conduct research at Nubi village. However, I was unable to discuss these guidelines with the RAS and DED due to their tight schedules. I only managed to discuss the guidelines with the VEO of the Nubi village when I was seeking a research permit to conduct research in

the village. I also discussed my guidelines with some key elders in the village. I then presented and discussed these protocols with some other Sukuma people to obtain a member check in order to determine the relevance of the created protocols in the Sukuma society. The protocols were well received and endorsed by colleagues from the Sukuma tribe. In the same spirit, to ascertain the relevance of the protocols in the village, I presented these eight protocols before the steering committee, which I formed (see below for details) as a way to involve Indigenous people in the design of the project and its analysis, and to obtain their endorsement for the project. The eight protocols were approved by this committee and one additional protocol was added — 'rules and regulations'. Therefore, in the end there was a set of nine key ethical protocols for Tanzanian researchers. The aim for conducting such discussions was to observe the relevance of these protocols in that particular village in order to make my research relevant and culturally sensitive. My research and the protocols were well received by the locals and everybody acknowledged this as being valuable research. Let me now turn to a brief account of the protocols I framed and the way they manifested in my research project.

### *Collaborative approach*

As has already been mentioned, research with indigenous communities must be a collaborative activity between a researcher and an Indigenous people to identify the research topic, aims, questions, design, analysis of the results and dissemination of the results, as it is assumed that 'learning and expertise exist in both parties' (Pipi *et al.*, 2004, p. 148). Based on this, I faced a challenge on how to involve the local community during the initial stages of my project. This is because the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Newcastle in Australia requires researchers to submit all research instruments, including the research proposal, participants' Information Statements, consent forms, interview guides, observation checklist and questionnaires to obtain ethical approval to conduct research in the intended country. Since I was in Australia, it was difficult for me to contact the local people in Tanzania to define the research topic, aims and questions and to agree on the design, analysis, ownership and dissemination of the findings. I submitted what I had prepared, hoping to submit an ethics variation to amend the approved protocol in case of any changes upon my arrival in Tanzania and discussions with the local people.

While in Tanzania, and after gaining ethical approval to undertake research at Nubi village, I formed a steering committee, comprised of five people, including the village chairperson, VEO, headmaster and two respected elders. I presented and discussed my research project with this committee. The aim was to obtain an endorsement from the local community. The committee examined my research project thoroughly, questioned me about the design, integrity and ethics of the project, and the benefits of the project to the wider community. The committee found my project to be very useful and only suggested one additional protocol as mentioned above. I think my familiarity with the culture of the researched community helped me to develop a project that managed to convince the committee. In addition, some members of this committee helped me in the identification of possible research participants to include in the study. Moreover, the committee acted as an advisory body, advising me throughout the entire process, and I became responsible for reporting back to the committee about how the research was going.



### Reciprocity

Reciprocity in IST entails that research is conducted so that the research outcomes benefit both the researcher and the community. It requires the researcher to give something back to the community in return (Louis, 2007). This benefit may be immediate or may take longer to happen and may be available only to the research participants or to the general community. It is argued that through reciprocity, a sense of connectedness is created (National Health and Medical Research Council (Australia), 2003). Recognising this, my research project offered several benefits to the community. First, I gave back to the community through my own expertise as I did some volunteer teaching at Nubi secondary school. I taught Kiswahili to Form I students for 2 months. I am a teacher by profession, specialising in the Kiswahili language and educational subjects. Before being employed as a university teacher at the Mkwawa University College of Education (MUCE), I taught in three secondary schools on different occasions, all located in Tabora region. I possess the requisite knowledge and experience for teaching at the secondary school level. Also, through informal sessions with some teachers, I was able to develop their ability to produce Scheme of Work and Lesson Plan preparations based on the recently introduced curriculum, the competence-based curriculum (CBC). This occurred following their complaints that the government had introduced this new curriculum without providing adequate professional development.

Second, since the data collection coincided with the rainy season, I sometimes went to dig in the field with some people (including my participants), especially in the maize and paddy farms, and volunteered in some community activities, such as the cleaning of the paddy irrigation canals. I did this to show that I was willing to help them in every day, vital tasks. Third, while I was still in the field, I made a financial contribution to the local authority to support a desk making campaign initiated by the President to end the shortage of desks in schools. The President urged all people, organisations, institution and traders to contribute desks such that they would tally with the number of enrolled students in schools. My financial contribution was equivalent to five desks. Fourth, as I will communicate findings of the research to the participants and the wider community in general, it is anticipated that longer-term benefits will flow from the availability of this information. For example, as the process for developing a Tanzanian version of IST emerges, this may be useful more broadly as a basis for a research paradigm more suited to local conditions, where local voices are heard, and the communities have a greater input into and control over what is researched and how the process is conducted.

### Respect

Respect is an important feature for starting and maintaining relationships among people (Martin, 2008). According to Sheehan and Walker (2001), respect entails the researcher being in the position and role that the local people think is suitable. They cite an example that, even when a researcher is asked to sweep the floor or any other task, he or she must handle that task diligently because respect is built on trust. And once such trust is established the research project is likely to produce successful results. However, Martin (2008) insists on self-respect first, as it is a precondition to respecting others who are involved in a relationship. Smith (2012) also notes that respect is a reciprocal thing and once

it is maintained, the place of everyone and everything in this world and in research will be balanced. Sheehan and Walker (2001) urge Indigenous researchers to respect everything in the community, including senior community members (elders), because they are repositories of indigenous knowledge. Respect concerns the ways the researcher pays attention, acknowledges and creates opportunities for different voices to be heard (Pipi *et al.*, 2004; Louis, 2007). This is because people who are involved in research are different from each other in terms of their age, socioeconomic background, sex, values, norms, aspirations, ethnicity and so on. Thus, the researcher must respect the people being studied and be prepared to interrogate and include in the research process all dimensions of such diversity.

In my case, I have respect for everything, including the land, culture, community and families. I respected all people involved in my research, such as the *bhanamhala* (male elders) and *bhagikolo* (female elders), the community leaders, the religious leaders, the school principal, the teachers, the parents and the children. I respected them as knowers and creators of their own knowledge and interrogated and incorporated all their views and concerns in my project to determine the reasons for girls' low enrolments, high dropout rates and poor performance in examinations. As already mentioned, in indigenous research elders are very important people to be respected and included in the research project, as they are keepers of indigenous knowledge. For this reason, I included them in my project through a steering committee that I formed in order to report to them and receive their views as the research proceeded. Moreover, I conducted in-depth formal and informal conversations with some of the elders about all aspects of the study. This was done in order to get the best out of their knowledge, wisdom and experience about the community.

### Deep listening

This principle demands listening deeply to all the voices that emerge during the research (Sheehan and Walker, 2001). Atkinson (2002) explains that people are more likely to listen and share with the researcher if the researcher listens to and shares with them. She also states that listening generates deep trust and respect, which are very important factors in any relationship. Thus, she advises researchers to listen quietly in order to learn from them. In fact, listening is a common way of learning in indigenous societies. Indigenous people learn to listen from the earliest days. Children and youths in pre-colonial indigenous societies in Tanzania and Africa in general learn by listening, watching their elders and then acting (Mushi, 2009). Therefore, this is a very important principle as far as indigenous research is concerned. In my research, I spent a lot of time listening carefully to all the people with whom I interacted rather than giving opinions. I listened to see stories explained, make meaning out of those stories in connection to my study and to familiarise myself with their comfortable and uncomfortable feelings. Essentially, in the Sukuma tribe, it is considered disrespectful and wrong to interrupt people when they are speaking. It requires one to listen until whoever is speaking is done. This does not mean that I did not speak, but this was done in a very respectful way for the purpose of supporting, acknowledging, challenging and asking questions or clarifications.

### Equality

Equality is a value that implies treating everyone involved in the research equally. As noted earlier, people who are involved in

the research are different in terms of their background, education, class and so on. Therefore, the researcher should not discriminate against people, but rather treat them equally. Also, equality entails an equal distribution of research benefits to research partners. If the research project is expected to bring benefit to participants who are involved, some participants should not benefit more than others (NHMRC, 2003). In my research, I strove to treat everybody equally. I made sure that the selection, recruitment, inclusion and exclusion of research participants was fair and just. Again, the benefits of my research, as explained above, were equally distributed or are expected to benefit all members. For example, the paddy irrigation canals that I cleaned together with other community members benefited all paddy farmers. My financial contribution for desks is intended to benefit a few children without desks, to enable them to learn in comfort with furniture like others. Likewise, my teaching at Nubi secondary school helped all students. More importantly, the benefit that will flow from the availability of this information is expected to improve secondary education for all girls in the village.

### **Responsibility and accountability**

This value relates to the researcher being answerable to someone or being responsible for his/her conduct. When doing research with Indigenous people the researcher is responsible to the community, the families, the people he or she is working with and the things that are valued (NHMRC, 2003). The most important responsibility for researcher is to cause no harm and contribute to the wellbeing of the community. Furthermore, the researcher needs to be committed to the participants and the ongoing relationship created between them. The researcher must also be committed to conducting sound, quality research that is culturally sensitive as well as rigorous. The researcher should ensure that they understand that all parts of the research activity are related and that he/she is required to be responsible to all relations (Chilisa, 2012). The current research did not cause harm to any individual and living or nonliving thing. I was aware of my responsibilities in terms of who I interacted with and how I interacted with them. I was particularly concerned about the safety of my participants. Participants need to feel safe for a research project to be successful. The first thing I did to achieve this was to ensure confidentiality. I promised my participants that I would not disclose their identity. Second, I allowed the participants to choose their own interview sites. These conditions supported the participants in feeling safe.

I was also accountable for the consequences of my actions to the following people. My first accountability was to the local village authority which gave me permission to conduct research in the village. Second, I was accountable to the steering committee that I formed. I told them that if I misbehave or go against these rules, they should call me and discuss with me any misconduct in order for me to change in light of improved actions. I also gave them and each participant my contact details, the aim being to provide to them a more approachable forum to raise any concern and to have their problems about the study solved.

### **Survival and protection**

This value requires researchers, through their research projects, to protect the culture and identity of the indigenous communities. It also requires that research projects contribute to the social and the cultural bonds that exist among indigenous communities.

Researchers should ensure that they take initial precautions against their research project contributing to any disrespect of, or discrimination against, the indigenous culture. In addition, researchers should ensure, through their research, that Indigenous people enjoy their cultural uniqueness (NHMRC, 2003). For my research, I maintained and protected the culture of the community. I did not vigorously condemn their way of doing things by saying 'This is wrong', or 'Do not do this', rather I provided opportunities for the members of the community to consider the things they see as working or not working in terms of secondary school. Besides, my project is not intended to denigrate the community, but rather contribute to societal development. Providing girls with the same chances of secondary education as boys means that the society will take many steps forward in terms of development.

### **Face-to-face interaction**

Here, the researcher is required to meet with people in person. This is critical when developing trust and relationship with Indigenous people (Sheehan and Walker, 2001; Pipi *et al.*, 2004). As noticed earlier, research with Indigenous people is all about developing relationships and trust. This is best achieved when researchers meet with people face-to-face. Being present in person also sends a message to the locals that the knowledge they hold is valued and that not all research is a threat to them (Sheehan and Walker, 2001). Within this research, face-to-face interaction was implemented in different ways. First, in negotiating entry to the research site, face-to-face contact was made between me and the RAS of Tabora region, DED of the involved district and VEO of Nubi village. Second, face-to-face contact was made between myself and some key elders and members of the steering committee during my presentation of the research protocols to them and during the co-construction process of the project. Third, I made face-to-face contact during the recruitment of research participants. Fourth, face-to-face contact was made during the conduct of the interviews and observations, and in the provision of feedback to potential research participants and the community at large.

### **Rules and regulations**

This refers to the need of researchers to observe the rules and regulations operating in a particular community (Wilson, 2008; Chilisa, 2012). Researchers should not be above the law, but they should live according to the governing rules, principles and regulations. In my research, I followed all the rules and regulations for conducting research, including obtaining permission from all the relevant authorities to stay and conduct research in Nubi village for 8 months. While in Nubi, I followed the rules and regulations of this community, as well as the ethical processes stipulated by the University of Newcastle. One strict rule that I observed was that which requires people not to walk in streets in the village centre after 10 pm. If one is found there after that time, he or she is caught by the guards and a heavy fine is imposed on him or her. This occurs to maintain the security of all the shops and the market in the village centre.

I also observed the local rules for recruiting participants in my study. Owing to the patriarchal system in the study area, female parents cannot freely agree to participate in the study unless permission is granted by their husbands. In this case, I asked for permission from their husbands before seeking their own consent.

Also, school children cannot freely agree to participate in the study unless permission is first obtained from their parents/guardians and the head teacher. As such, I asked permission first from parents/guardians and the head teacher before inviting the children to participate in my study. Furthermore, for the out-of-school girls who are still under their parents/guardians' authority, permission was first asked from their parents/guardians before asking for their own consent. Also, to recruit teachers, permission was first obtained from the headmaster. For participants who cannot read and write, verbal consent was obtained and recorded.

In applying these ethical principles in my research, I am not saying that I did not make any mistakes, or my behaviours were perfect at all times, and that all of the community members' and research participants were interpreted correctly. While I was aware of this limitation, the steering committee was frequently consulted to check, guide and advise me throughout the entire process.

### Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, IST is a unique approach which is widely used in Australia, New Zealand and Canada to guide the conduct of research when studying Indigenous people. In Africa and Tanzania in particular, this approach is new. In fact, there has been no study in the context of Tanzania which has used IST, despite the presence of many Indigenous people in the country. As such, my study is the first one in the context of Tanzania to use this unique approach. By using this approach, a significant new contribution to the area of IST in Tanzania and Africa in general has been established. IST has helped me to create nine ethical protocols, derived from the protocols established by IST elsewhere, for conducting culturally, respectful and safe research with the Sukuma people in Tanzania. These protocols include: a collaborative approach; reciprocity; respect; deep listening; equality; responsibility and accountability; survival and protection; face-to-face interaction and rules and regulations. Therefore, this may serve as a starting reference point for other future researchers in Tanzania if they apply IST in their research such that the voices of Indigenous people may be heard, and the community has a greater degree of control and input in the planning and designing of the project, as well as the analysis and dissemination of the information.

In addition, though these protocols were locally constructed for Tanzania researchers, they may well be relevant to many other African countries. As argued earlier, IST is relatively new to many African countries. As such, this study is the beginning of a new journey in Africa and may influence many other African countries. Researchers from different African countries can use this set of protocols in different kinds of research. Furthermore, because I obeyed the protocols, I was able to obtain very deep information from a wide range of participants, including young girls, even though I am a male Tanzanian researcher.

Although these protocols were developed and applied in a qualitative indigenous study, they may also be used in indigenous research that applies mixed-methods research designs. It is well argued that 'by combining current qualitative research methods with the specific aspirations of indigenous communities in a mixed method strategy, it may be possible to build appropriate theoretical tools and ethical practices for indigenous research' (Botha, 2011, p. 313). This in turn may help to examine research questions in the best way possible (Chilisa and Tsheko, 2014).

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**Statement of originality.** I hereby certify that this manuscript is an original work that has not been submitted to nor published anywhere else.

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