

Introduction

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Knowledge is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it.

Akan proverb

The nature and complexity of societal problems invoke the need to craft responses, not from an insular and narrow-minded perspective, but from an open-minded perspective that is inclusive of a variety of thoughts and paradigms. This need to recast societal problems outside the traditional discipline boundaries and reach solutions based on a redefined understanding of complex situations saw the emergence of Transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity aims to systematically and holistically focus on problem-solving while drawing on a variety of seemingly disparate disciplines and *knowledges*. Haverkort and Reijntjes (2006:2) note that Transdisciplinarity is a relatively recent approach (to knowledge generation) having emerged seven centuries later than disciplinarity which, itself, followed the work of the Swiss philosopher and psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980). In this Issue of the African Journal of Governance and Development, it is with brevity that we reflect on Transdisciplinarity. We see this as relevant and timely given the contemporary and contextual imperatives on the African continent. Working in silos insulates the cross-pollination of *knowledges*, practices, praxes, know-how and technologies and does not augur well to finding solutions for Africa's multifaceted problems. For Max-Neef, 'Disciplinarity relates to a mono-discipline, which represents specialization in isolation' (Max-Neef, 2005: 3). McGregor (n.d) opines that single disciplinary work, while possible, is constrained when solving complex problems by viewing things through a single lens. If inter-disciplinarity represents the transference of discipline-specific methods to another but keeping the disciplines 'pure', we define transdisciplinarity as a synthesis of disciplines without subordinating any. It involves many disciplines undergirding transdisciplinary research. In other words, transdisciplinary accords all disciplines equal status. *Trans* refers to *across* disciplines, *between* disciplines and *beyond and outside* all disciplines as it *traverses* all possible disciplines – 'to crisscross, zigzag, and move laterally from side to side' (Nègre, 1999 cited in McGregor, n.d). How then is it different from multidisciplinary?



Haverkort & Reijntjes (2006) define multidisciplinary as an investigation of a phenomenon in several disciplines at the same time but loyalty remains in the home discipline. Although multidisciplinary work overflows disciplinary boundaries, it remains disciplinary research. Colins (2002 cited in McGregor, n.d: 5) observes that 'If we simply mingle disciplines to problem solve, while each discipline maintains its distinctiveness, we are multidisciplinary'. Haverkort & Reijntjes (2006:10) contend that the goal of transdisciplinarity 'is the understanding of the present world, of which one of the imperatives is the unity of knowledge'.

As such, for McGregor, (n.d: 8), 'transdisciplinary takes us *beyond* disciplines by weaving a new kind of *knowledge*'. Within the context of Africa, we seek new theories, concepts and paradigms to explain our circumstances – our growth trajectories, our governance structures, prospects for development, our hopes and imaginings for a better Africa – of alternative economics, alternative governance, alternative development and alternative environmental studies – our own studies – African studies by Africans for Africans. For, as argued by Odoro - Hoppers "...the crisis we face (in Africa) today is definitely no longer that of 'economics', 'politics' or 'culture' per se; neither is it, for that matter, a crisis of the humanities versus the natural sciences; but rather it is one in which there is a peculiar convergence of all these factors and which, together, form an entirety exceeding the sum of its parts" (2009:168).

Spurred by transdisciplinarity we present, in this Issue, articles that seem disparate in thrust but which in coalesce to debunk the silo mentality.

Jackson Aluede investigates the logics of cross-border conflict whose genesis he traces to technologies of colonialism and the partitioning of Africa. The consequences have been tendencies to irredentism and perpetual boundary disputes between (and within) countries. Warikanda, Nhemachena & Mtapuri (2017: xvii) argue that 'the fatal weakness of existing theories and discourses on (contextless) action and agency lie in the fact that they neglect the historicity of agency and action; the ways in which agency and actions are contextualized, framed and influenced by historical colonial aspects including enslavement, dispossession, robbery, looting, exploitation and zombification of the enslaved and (neo-) colonized victims'. It is this legacy that Africans live and re-live in their everyday lives. Aluede argues that it is in the scramble for Africa and its subsequent partitioning that ethnic rivalry in Africa had its evolution and in turn, ethnic rivalry is hamstringing and stultifying efforts at nation-building. He found the dialogic encounters



between limitrophe states as scholarly, intellectual and emancipatory for the bordering communities and states.

Ebele Mogo et al examine issues related to urban health and the prospects for urban health and community resilience in the context of Lagos State's development agenda in the context of Lagos State. They lament the fact that while state government's development agenda alludes to some important focus areas, it negates others thus breaching the imperatives of transdisciplinarity in that issues of governance and citizen participation for holistic outcomes were ignored. The authors suggest that it behoves health planners and urban planners to synergize their activities so as to deliver holistic solutions as transdisciplinarity would behest. The advantage of adopting a transdisciplinary approach is that methods, approaches and assumptions are shared, in dialogue, so that new approaches emerge to solve complex societal problems (Lattanzi, 1998 in McGregor, n.d: 6).

In their paper, **Mojapelo and Kok** deal with adherence to occupational health and safety standards using the case of a South African steel processing company. They opine that occupational accidents have dual forked impacts on the financial and non-financial status of individuals and firms. The study found out that employees were satisfied with how health and safety were handled by the firm which had the support of the labour union. They observed that the active participation of the labour union in health and safety issues does matter. Issues of occupational health and safety beckon that they too need to be viewed through a transdisciplinary lens.

In conclusion, we are of the view that we have reached a point in our evolution as human beings, in which we know very much, but understand very little. The discussions in ensuing articles attest to the value of working across traditional disciplines and sectors. We echo the words of Max-Neef that 'Transdisciplinarity, more than a new discipline or super-discipline is, actually, a different manner of seeing the world, more systemic and more holistic (2005: 15).

And as the Akan people in their wisdom remind us *Knowledge is like a baobab tree; no one individual (discipline) can embrace it.*

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