

Blending indigenous knowledge, policy setting and decision-making for health care and welfare

Ntambwe Malangu¹

This issue presents a collection of papers on health system issues and reflections on indigenous knowledge systems' issues. Health systems issues include food consumption changes and stigmatisation of people with HIV in Botswana; a consideration of evidence in the change of policy and management of malaria in Ethiopia; patients' satisfaction evaluation, occupational health challenges in the meat industry, adolescents views about unplanned pregnancies, and the issues and outcomes about the 30-minute rule in the performance of emergency caesarean section for foetal distress in South Africa.

Papers on indigenous knowledge systems raise some conceptual and policy debates on the role of traditional medicines used in managing animal health; the rites of passage in indigenous people; and a perspective on whether preserving the Central Kalahari Game Reserve without the indigenous people is a worthy option. A review on a book detailing the removal and re-settlement of the San people provides some food for thought.

Taken together, these writings elucidate the challenges faced by the African health care systems and the difficulty in setting and implementing policies with varying degrees of evidence both at individual and country levels. At individual level, adolescent mothers are reported to have experienced unplanned pregnancies as disruptive owing to their unpreparedness for the roles related to raising a child and on their life plans. The real question is, with the availability of modern contraceptive methods, why are unplanned pregnancies still occurring?

Similarly, at national level, besides the issues of distributive justice and unfairness, was the expulsion of the San people from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve the most acceptable option? Considering the accumulated knowledge of San people on how to live and survive in this desert area, why was the need for preserving the game reserve and the right of San people to live in their ancestral environment not balanced into creating a mechanism for lively co-existence and mutual satisfaction of the two imperatives?

The above questions and several others present opportunities for African researchers to continue to ponder and investigate in order to find real, practical and applicable solutions to challenges unique to our continent. This is a job which is ongoing and which requires all of us.

¹ School of Public Health, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, Pretoria. Email; Gustav_Malangu@smu.ac.za.