


# Chapter 6

## Preserving Medicinal Indigenous Knowledge Among Zimbabwean Communities Through Digitization

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Traditional knowledge has always played a critical role in the health fraternity of most African countries. However, indigenous communities in Zimbabwe continue to lose their valuable knowledge through such factors as globalization, climate change and death or memory loss of the elders. The threats of extinction of this knowledge particularly medicinal IKS such as herbal medicine and indigenous healing have been facilitated by lack of recordings since most of it relies on oral and memory transmission, too much preference for western health systems and lack of intellectual property protection from pirates. The loss of such critical knowledge has led to continued community diseases and ultimately loss of life in some circumstances. Culture is also threatened whenever there is a loss of its essential system of knowl-*

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*edge. This chapter details how traditional medicine such as the use of herbs is a key player in the health of indigenous communities. It also unpacks what efforts can be made to preserve such knowledge systems.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Traditional knowledge has always played a significant part in the development of most African countries. However, the indigenous people of Zimbabwe continue to lose their valuable knowledge through such factors as globalization, climate change and death or memory loss of the elders. The threats of extinction of this knowledge particularly medicinal indigenous knowledge system (IKS) that include herbal indigenous medicine have been facilitated by lack of recordings since most of it relies on oral and memory transmission, too much preference for western health systems and lack of intellectual property protection from pirates. The loss of such critical knowledge has led to continued community diseases and ultimately loss of life in some circumstances. Culture is also threatened whenever there is a loss of its essential system of knowledge. This chapter details how traditional medicine such as the use of herbs is a key player in the health of indigenous communities. It also unpacks what efforts can be made to preserve such knowledge systems. The focus will be more on harnessing digital technologies such as Artificial intelligence tools and applications, social media applications, and other online technologies emphasizing their potentiality in preserving, sharing and utilising such traditional medicinal knowledge systems.

Nations need to capitalize on these technologies through digitization to enable long-term preservation. Technology also has the capability of making indigenous knowledge systems available on the open access platform thereby improving access. Preservation of IKS is critical in that some of the knowledge has the potential to contribute to the sustainable development of many communities. The chapter therefore explores the strategies and efforts used in Zimbabwe to digitalise IKS. It also shows the barriers being faced such as lack of experts, lack of support from the health professional councils, copyright and intellectual challenges, and technological obsolescence. However, the chapter documents how digitization can be the panacea to the long-term preservation of traditional medicinal knowledge systems. The ethical issues surrounding the use of digital technologies are also discussed. The chapter is critical in that it contributes to preserving medical knowledge systems through harnessing emerging digital technologies. Scholars need therefore to find possible ways of promoting indigenous knowledge systems because they have the potential to contribute immensely to a nation's development.

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