

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Role of Art in Sustaining the Livelihoods of Amandebele Women in South Africa

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#### Abstract

Initially, the Ndebele artwork was exclusively the practice of making beaded and painted walls and other structures to preserve the Ndebele culture. However, today their specialty lies in making has some economic driving force, not just customary motivations. This was indigenous research that was informed by the eZiko, Sipheka Sisophula theory and aimed to discuss and highlight how Ndebele women use their art that has cultural significance to sustain their livelihoods. An exploratory research design that is most consistent with Indigenous knowledge research was utilized in this study. Semi-structured interviews together with descriptive analysis were used as tools. Utilizing a convenient sampling procedure, twelve entrepreneurs from Ndebele art school owned by Dr. Esther Mahlangu were sampled. Two data analysis processes were utilized. Firstly, the data were analyzed using the descriptive analysis process. Secondly, data analysis was performed through a thematic analysis, where various themes and emerging themes were identified. The findings of this study stated that Ndebele artists are breadwinners who survive by selling their artwork to sustain their livelihoods. They work for Dr. Esther Mahlangu and at the same time businesswomen who sell their art on different platforms. Furthermore, using the achievements of Dr. Esther Mahlangu as examples, this study showed how Dr. Esther Mahlangu has managed to create wealth and obtain global recognition through her artwork. The use of indigenous knowledge (IK) for wealth and job creation is supported by the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Policy (2004) of South Africa which also acknowledges and supports the role of women in preserving IK.

**Keywords:** *AmaNdebele; culture; women; art; sustain; indigenous knowledge; job; wealth*

#### Introduction

In Africa, there are three fundamental groups of Ndebele people: the Southern Transvaal Ndebele (now Gauteng and Mpumalanga), the Northern Transvaal Ndebele (now Limpopo Province) around the towns of Mokopane (Potgietersrus) and Polokwane (Pietersburg), and the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe, which the British called the Matabele (Mahlangu, 2016). The two groups of South African Ndebele are geographically isolated, yet additionally contrasted in their language and cultural practices. The Ndzundza Ndebele of Mpumalanga and Gauteng (Southern Ndebele) produces the well-known house-painting, beadwork, and ornamentation that reflect symmetrical geometry, which the study will place its focus on them (Mashiyane, 2006).

For this study, a clear understanding of culture is important to understand the culture of the Ndebele people. According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952: 181), "culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of customary ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action". Culture is liquid in nature, it develops and changes constantly (Spencer-Oatey 2008). The culture of the Ndebele people revolves around rituals such as rites of passage or initiation ceremonies and traditional weddings. For all rituals, AmaNdebele women adorn themselves with colourful beaded sophisticated attires. These colourful beaded clothes also bear vivid testimony to the distinctiveness of Ndebele culture within the broader world of inter-ethnic politics (Mashiyane, 2006).

AmaNdebele women have been seen in the course of recent years to increase tremendous market experience. According to Levy (1993), these women have now come to understand the adjustments in the aim behind their ritual endeavor of art-making. According to Schneider (1986), Ndebele art, which has mathematical ideas and concepts, now serves as an aesthetic commodity. This art which is culture and the Indigenous Knowledge of Ndebele is now seen as an economic bridge to the current 21st century for women and their entire families'. The Ndebele art is currently seen as fashionable and the products are being sold to tourists and South African citizens. According to Steiner (1994), women who are custodians of this art are now able to become breadwinners for their families.

This has been seen by women as a strategy to eliminate poverty and become more independent and self-reliant. Van Vuuren (2012) mentioned that today, AmaNdebele women like Dr. Esther Mahlangu can showcase their talents and skills internationally and most women are selling their artistic work in their homes, at local central business districts, and art galleries across South Africa. The objective that informed this chapter was to explore how art sustains the livelihoods of AmaNdebele women. The work was guided by the question: How does Ndebele art with mathematical concepts and ideas help in sustaining the livelihoods of AmaNdebele women?

### **Using indigenous knowledge as a tool for job and wealth creation**

For this study, Indigenous Knowledge is defined as the cumulative body of strategies, practices, techniques, tools, intellectual resources, and explanations accumulated over time in a particular locality, without the interference and impositions of external hegemonic forces, shared from one generation to another (Grenier, 1998). The indigenous Knowledge of African people can be used for cultural purposes and as a wealth creation tool. Indigenous knowledge informs the majority of decision-making in local communities around the world, and its implementation in the creation of strategies for growth and development is fundamental to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2016).

Therefore, according to Scoones (1998), using traditional cultural material such as artwork for economic development within indigenous communities creates the opportunity for the establishment of community enterprises, local job creation, skills development, appropriate tourism, and foreign earnings from community products. Mazibuko (2013) added that the marketing of artistic items additionally represents a way for indigenous communities to show and strengthen their cultural diversity and identity. In this way, it is imperative to utilize indigenous knowledge-based strategies for economic empowerment since they give a comprehension of local realities. Mazibuko (2013) further stated that it is therefore important to entrust indigenous people with the responsibility to develop themselves and sustain their livelihoods using their creations and long-existing knowledge which has been passed down from one generation to another. This is supported by the South African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Policy of 2004 which focuses on the importance of underpinning the contribution of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) to the economy, the role of IK in employment and wealth creation.

In South Africa, IKS is owned by and provides services to people who are prone to unemployment (National Research Foundation, 2015). Consideration, therefore, needs to be given to the role that IKS can play in employment creation (Green, 2008). The IKS policy also encourages the participation of women in all levels of IK promotion and innovation. Participation is understood to involve responsibility, trust, and co-operation. This means empowerment for women, giving them more autonomy and decision-making power over their own lives and circumstances (Mosimege, 2004; Mosimege, 2007; Domfeh, 2007).

### **The theoretical framework of the study**

eZiko Sipheka Sisophula is Goduka's theoretical framework (2005) which is rooted in African worldviews and does not forget languages and cultures has guided this study. This theory expresses that the knowledge that constitutes African worldviews, culture, and cultures should serve to steer and sustain those that hold it to be important with regards to improving their lives as a community. For this research, this theoretical framework was crucial because it shares capacities that can alleviate poverty and establish sustainable development in a rural context.

### **Indigenous philosophical underpinnings of this study**

This research was performed using an indigenous lens by an African indigenous scholar with an African cultural background. The research was underpinned by indigenous research methodologies to correct and restore integrity

and hope to the people of Africa who have experienced unforgettable marginalization and injustice in both research and other scholarly domains (Steinhauer, 2002).

The 2004 South African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Regulation and the 2019 IKS ACT legislation further underpinned this study. The 2004 South African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Policy focuses on the importance of underpinning Indigenous Knowledge (IK)'s contribution to the economy, IK's role in employment, and wealth creation. In South Africa, IKS is owned by and provides services to people who are prone to unemployment (National Research Foundation, 2015). Consideration, therefore, needs to be given to the role that IKS can play in employment creation (Green, 2008). The IKS policy also encourages the participation of women in all levels of IK promotion and innovation. Participation is understood to involve responsibility, trust, and co-operation.

The 2019 IKS ACT (former known as IKS Bill) states that promoting public awareness and understanding of indigenous knowledge is important for broader application and development. According to Pandor (2015), a benefit-sharing agreement between the community and the third party must be reached in the event of access to indigenous knowledge systems for commercial or industrial applications. The benefit-sharing agreement must include terms that guarantee due compensation for such access, and guarantee that any benefits deriving from it are distributed equitably. The NIKSO may assist indigenous communities in concluding benefits-sharing agreements with third parties

### **Methodology**

This study adopted an exploratory research design. The researcher wanted to explore how Ndebele entrepreneurs can sustain their livelihoods using their art. The target population for this study was fifteen women at Ndebele art school. This population was selected because they are entrepreneurs who are making a living using their art. For years, they have been able to improve their economic status and livelihoods using their artistic works (Vonk, 2016). The sample size consisted of twelve entrepreneurs from Ndebele art school who availed themselves. Thus, a convenient sampling procedure was used (Creswell & Clark-Plano, 2017).

A semi-structured face-to-face interview guide was used as a tool to collect data from participants. It was divided into two parts, which are: (1) Section A which had closed-ended questions where the researcher focused on the demographics of the participants, and (2) Section B, which focused on open-ended questions.

The semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with entrepreneurs which included Dr. Esther Mahlangu at the Ndebele art school which was initially for children but currently accommodates all women of different age groups in IsiNdebele with no assistance of a translator since the researcher knew and understood the language. For each interview, the researcher explained to each participant about the research process. The participants had an opportunity to ask questions before the interviews commenced or withdraw from taking part. The semi-structured interviews had close-ended questions and open-ended questions, which guided the researcher to present data in two analyses. Each interview with a participant took approximately an hour. A digital recorder, diary, and photo camera were utilized as instruments to capture data.

For this study, two data analysis processes were utilized. Firstly, the data were analyzed using the descriptive analysis process. The process consisted of calculating data using the IBM-Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS - version 24.0) datasheet. Defined data was analysed to generate descriptive statistics (Oja, 1983). Descriptive analysis included percentages and currency. The results were used to construct different charts and graphs for this chapter. Second, a thematic analysis was used to analyse data from open-ended questions. Data collected during the semi-structured face-to-face interviews were first transcribed from the voice recordings and translated from IsiNdebele to English. The analysis was manually done on the data and themes were identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To check the accuracy, the researcher read across data files. Where gaps were identified, the researcher had to member check the study area to seek clarity for trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1986).

### **Results**

The results of this study are presented in two sections. Firstly, the results were received from SPSS; second, the themes that were generated from the thematic analysis.

*Demographic characteristics of participants*

Figure 1 shows that 52% of the participants were widows with no means of income other than bead making. That contributed to how most women decided to become breadwinners and develop strategies of eliminating poverty, using their art. Most women argued that having no means of income made them responsible for taking care of their households financially and paying for the tuition fees of their children. One of the most difficult decisions AmaNdebele women who are widows are expected to make is to wed the male sibling of her late husband to have financial security. The family of the late husband neglects those who choose to ignore this cultural custom financially and they are expected to provide for the family in any means possible. 35 % of participants were married whereas 9% were single and never married. 4% of women were divorced. According to them, they divorced their husbands traditionally and had to gain financial independence because they had previously depended on their husbands for financial assistance.

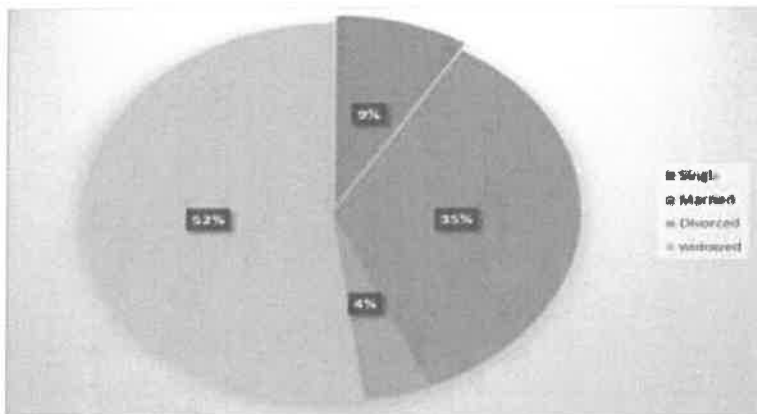


Figure 1: The marital status of participants.

The results in figure 2 show that the majority of AmaNdebele women who are artists and entrepreneurs at Ndebele cultural school are 40 years old and above. About 40 % of the participants of this study were elderly women who were 62 years and older. The results also show that the number of young people who are entrepreneurs is less. This means that the majority of people who make a living and use this art are elderly women.

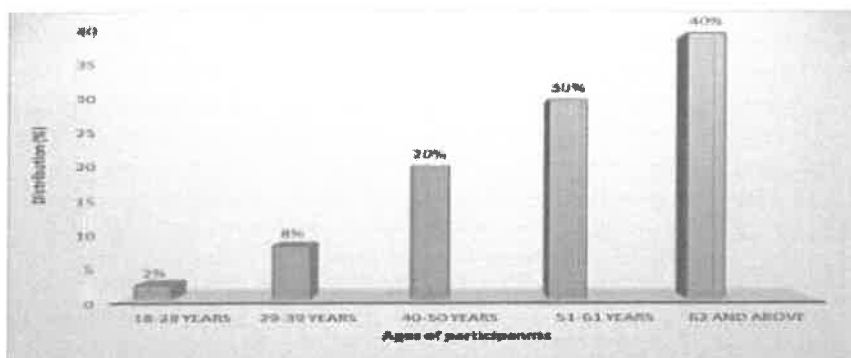


Figure 2: Age groups of participants.

Figure 3 shows that about 88% of participants never went to any formal school. Most of these participants do not know how to read and some of them only know how to read their names because that is what they can write. The 8% shows that there are participants who were able to attend the foundation phase level of education (Grade 1-3). About 2% who were young adults, under the age of 40 years were able to attend between grades 4-6 while the other 2% of young adults attended between 4-6 grades.

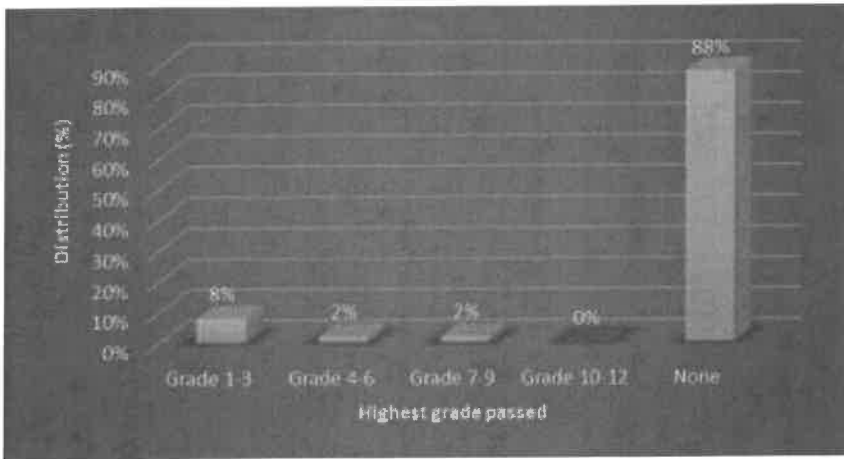


Figure 3: The level of formal education participants have received.

The finding in figure 4 showed that about 55% of the participants in this study specialize in both beadwork and mural art (painting). Participant 10 justified her response by stating that it is very unlikely to find AmaNdebele women specializing in one type of art. She further argued that once a woman masters one art, she can easily learn another. According to Participant 1, being a master of beadwork and painted art sustains a business because customers can purchase all sorts of beaded and painted art from one entrepreneur. About 30% of the participants specialize in beadwork whereas 15% are experts in painted art. Justifying her response, participant 11 argued that she prefers mastering beadwork because it is her passion while participant 7 stated that she was taught only mural art from a young age by her mother. However, she stated that a gap for painting in the commercial market has been identified and she is currently painting other artifacts and cloths utilizing designs that were initially used in mural art.

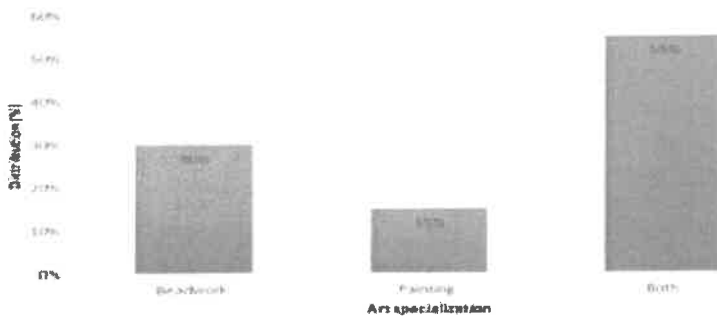


Figure 4: Types of art specialization.

At least 45% of participants indicated that they have 41 years of experience and above, 35% indicated that they have experience of 31- 40 years in Ndebele art practice. About 20% of participants indicated that they have been practicing for over 20 years. Participant 1 who has been practicing for over 41 years indicated that she started doing this art at a very tender age. She further stated that the sophistication and neatness of her art show that she is not an amateur but an expert with years of experience.

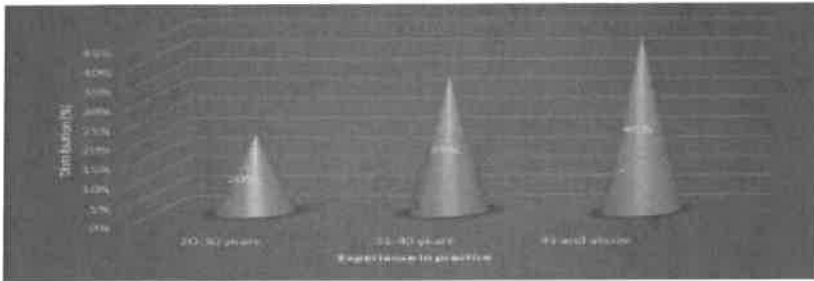


Figure 5: Experience in practice.

Findings of this study show that 50% of the participants have been selling their art for more than 20 years. They argued that they have been selling to locals for a very long period and they grew up exposed to this business from their homes. In support of this statement, participant 12 stated that they have learned how to manage this business from an early age, trained by their mothers. One participant stated that when she got married, she continued with her business and taught her daughters at a later stage. 38% of participants indicated that they have been entrepreneurs of Ndebele art for not more than 20 years. The 12% indicated that they only develop an interest to sell their art after their husbands died and which they had to take care of their families.

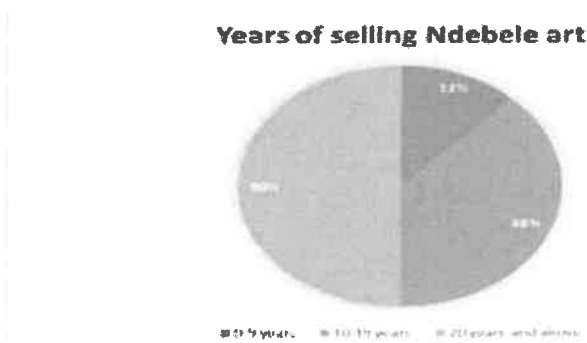


Figure 6: Years of selling artifacts among study participants.

As shown in figure 7, participants are fully employed by Dr. Esther Mahlangu but are not restricted to make extra income separately. Participants are paid R3000.00 monthly by Dr. Esther Mahlangu. In an arranged order, participant 6 provided three cases to the researcher as follows: The first case was that the artists are also employed by Dr. Esther Mahlangu and she pays them salaries that are equal at the end of the month. Secondly, the Ndebele entrepreneurs are not restricted from selling their art in the comfort of their own homes or on local markets. Thirdly, in case Dr. Esther Mahlangu is invited to exhibit in a gallery, she gives artists who work with her an opportunity to exhibit their art to potential buyers to earn extra income. In support of this arrangement, participant 9 indicated that their basic salary is R3000 received from their employer but they can make an extra income by freelancing such as having stalls in town or selling at home. The findings indicate that there is only one participant who was Dr. Esther Mahlangu, which earns a higher salary/income compared to artists. She elaborated that there are different streams that she utilizes which generate monthly income. She made an example of the Belvedere Vodka bottle she painted in 2017 for the popular musician John Legend from the United States of America from which she still receives royalties.

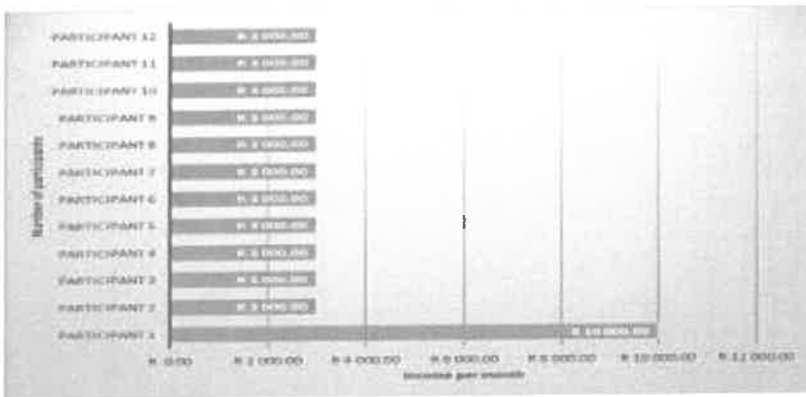


Figure 7: Monthly income from selling artifacts among participants.

About 58 % of participants indicated that this money helps them with household expenses such as buying groceries, electricity, renovating their houses (when necessary), buying furniture, and paying other expenses. About 40% of the participants highlighted that the capital made from selling articles has assisted them in taking their children to schools and pay for their tuition fees. Participant 12 indicated that her children are currently higher institution graduates and working proper jobs. She further indicated that the money she makes selling this art assisted in taking her children to higher institutions so that they can get good jobs. 2% of participants argued that they use their money for non-important purposes, which are not urgent needs to their lives. The results reveal that AmaNdebele women depend highly on the work they do to survive and take care of their loved ones.

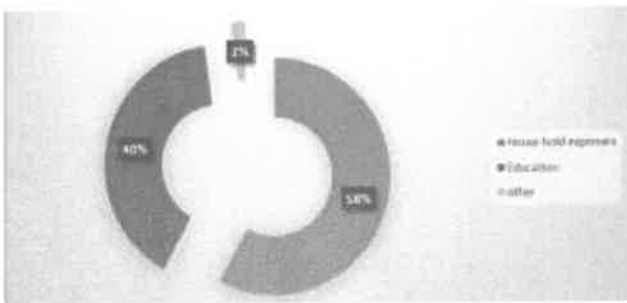


Figure 8: Uses of income by women entrepreneurs in the study.

*Themes identified*

The themes that were identified were as follows: (1) the commercialization of Ndebele art; (2) the target market for the Ndebele art; (3) the use of Ndebele art for the branding of commercialized products; and (4) the recognition of individuals due to Ndebele art.

The commercialization of Ndebele art

Ndebele artists sell artifacts such as beaded dolls (Figure 9) and other ornaments such as decorated fashionable neck hoops (Figure 10). Ndebele women sell through different platforms such as galleries and art festivals. Ndebele women continue to be innovative to ‘keep up’ with current fashion trends so that they can target not only elderly people but also young people who love fashion. The commercialization of this art has opened many job opportunities for AmaNdebele women who have no means of income and who have the major responsibility of taking care of their loved ones.



Figure 9: Ndebele beaded dolls.

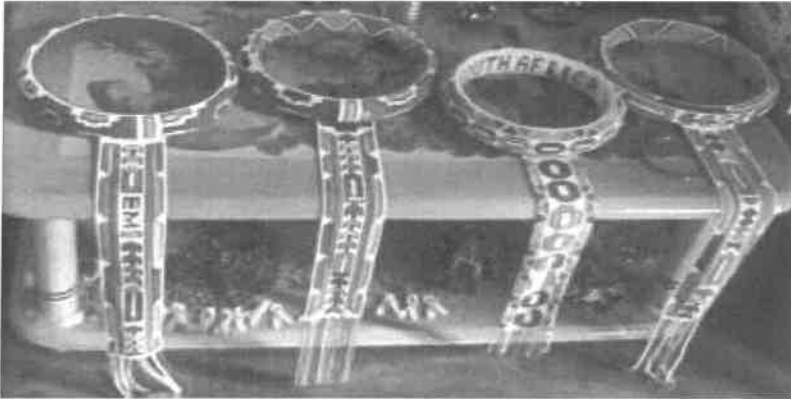


Figure 10: Fashionable Ndebele beaded neck hoops.

#### The target market for the Ndebele art

The target market is for both local people and international tourists who visit Dr. Esther Mahlangu's indigenous cultural art gallery (Figure 11) and the Ndebele art school (Figure 12). Participant 10 highlighted that every month new international tourists arrive to see the home of Dr. Esther Mahlangu, which has a school and a gallery that is separated by a small distance. Due to such exposure, Dr. Esther Mahlangu had to hire brand name officials and managers. As a result, brand name officials and a manager conclude deals on her behalf. The job of these people is to ensure that the product is received and perceived positively by outside markets. Brand officials can protect the product from being misused in any possible way. Furthermore, they run the maintenance to ensure that their adversaries in the industry do not meddle with their brand name or promote perversely and unfairly against them. Brand names also insure that 'middle' men do not get the opportunity to rob Ndebele women who are trying to make a living off their art.





Figure 11: Dr. Esther Mahlangu's indigenous cultural art gallery

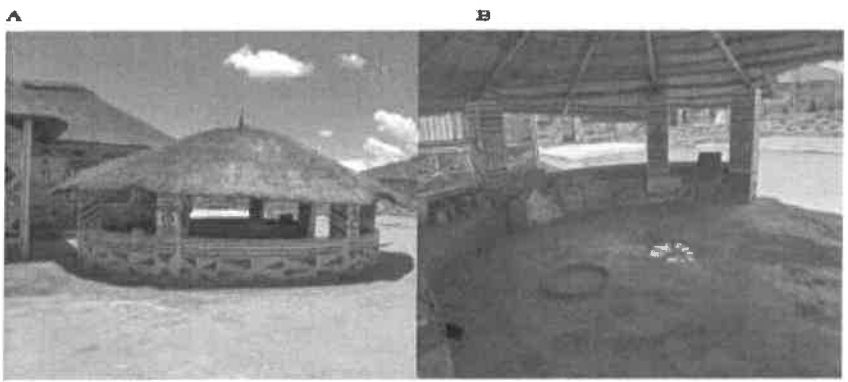


Figure 12: Ndebele art school in Ekosini village

The use of Ndebele art for the branding of commercialized products

In 1991, Dr. Mahlangu painted the BMW 525i (Figure 13), which made her popular and made her known all over the world. Since then, she has been travelling and branding products for companies. According to this participant, one of her breakthroughs is when she worked with the famous musician, John Legend (Figure 14) and designed the Belvedere Vodka bottles (Figure 15). In 2018, Dr. Esther Mahlangu worked with Tiger Brands and decorated the cover of Tastic Rice (Figure 16) and Albany Bread (Figure 17). She also worked with Freshpak Company and decorated the container of the Freshpak rooibos tea (Figure 18). This was done during the Heritage month (September).



Figure 13: BMW 525i decorated by Dr. Esther Mahlangu in 1991. (Sourced from: [www.wheels24.co.za](http://www.wheels24.co.za)).



Figure 14: Dr. Esther Mahlangu with musician, John Legend showing the Belvredre vodka bottle. (Sourced from: (Previdar, 2016)).



Figure 15: Dr. Esther Mahlangu decorating a Belvrede vodka bottle. (Sourced from: (Previdar, 2016)).



Figure 16: The researcher holding the Tastic rice from one of the supermarkets in the Republic of South Africa (RSA), which was decorated by Dr. Esther Mahlangu.

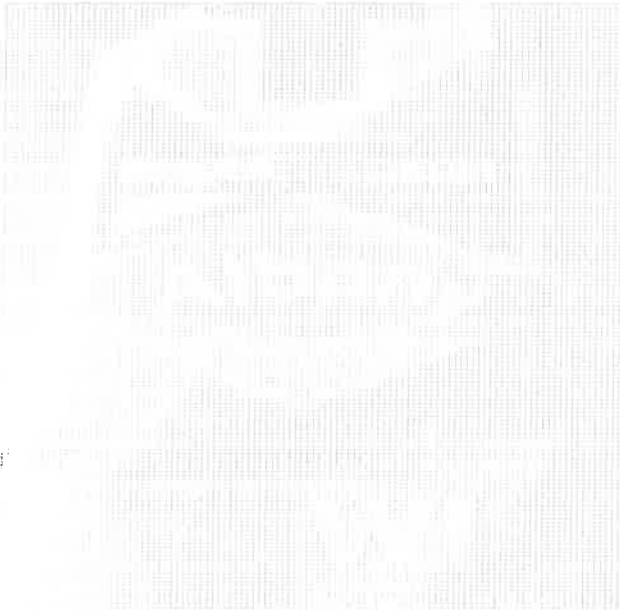


Figure 17: The Albany bread plastic decorated by Dr. Esther Mahlangu.

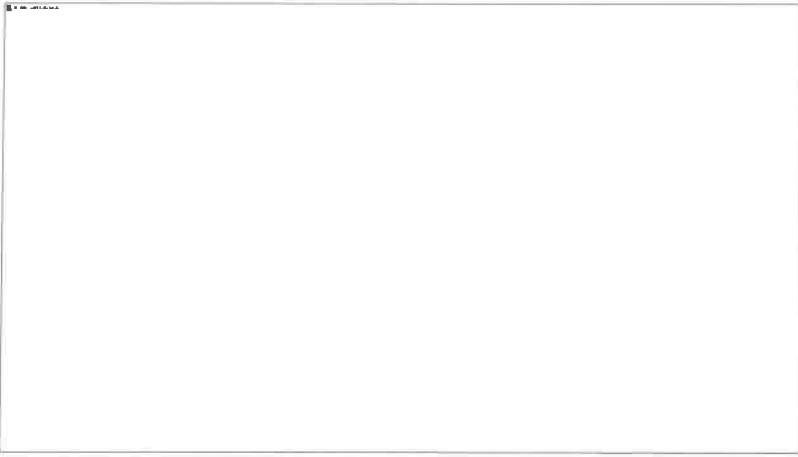


Figure 18: A Freshpak Rooibos tea container decorated by Dr. Esther Mahlangu.

#### The recognition of individuals due to Ndebele art

In September 2017, Dr. Esther Mahlangu was honored with a Ndebele street mural named *Xola* which means peace in English (Figure 19), situated in New York, in the United States of America (USA). Some of her work is currently exhibited in an African gallery in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, USA (Figure 20). Dr. Mahlangu received an honorary doctoral degree in March 2018 from the University of Johannesburg (UJ) as shown in Figure 21. She later received another honorary degree in September 2018 from Durban University of Technology (DUT) as provided in Figure 22.

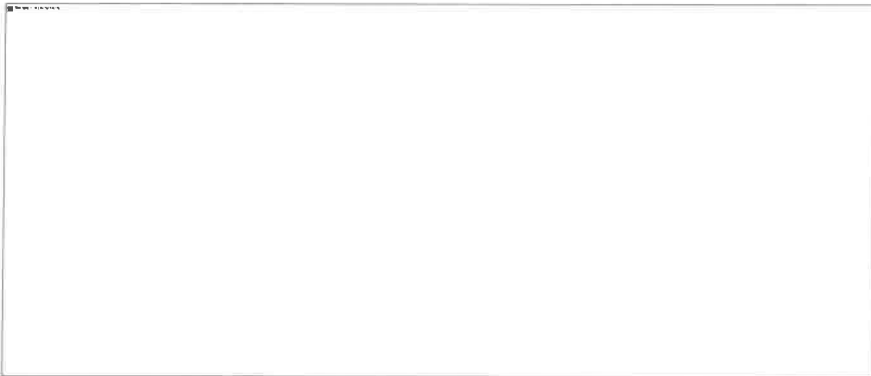


Figure 19: Ndebele street mural dedicated to Dr. Esther Mahlangu in New York City, United States of America. (Sourced from: (Stephens, 2017)).



Figure 20: Dr. Esther Mahlangu's paintings at the African gallery of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, USA. (Sourced from: (Privateedition, 2017)).

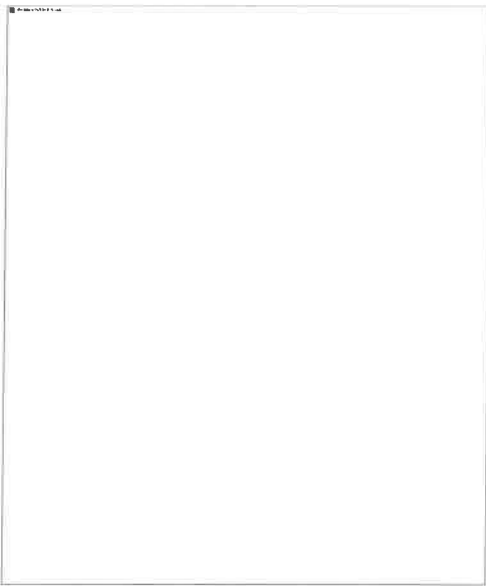


Figure 21: Dr. Esther Mahlangu receiving an honorary degree at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). (Sourced from: (Khoza, 2018)).

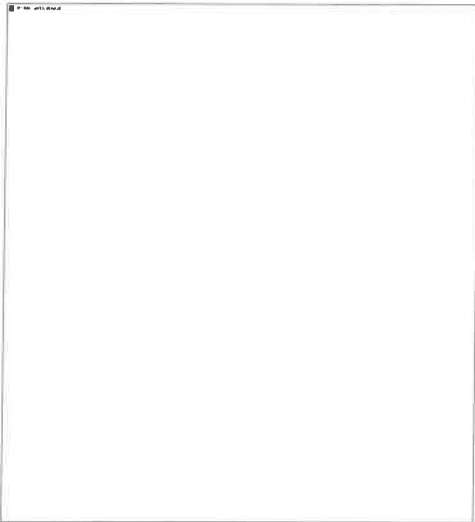


Figure 22: Dr. Esther Mahlangu receiving an honorary doctorate from Durban University of Technology (DUT). (Sourced from: (Bhengu, 2018)).

### **Discussion**

This paper has revealed that AmaNdebele women sell their art to make a living. The commercialization of art has improved the livelihoods of Ndebele women in different ways. An example was made of Dr. Esther Mahlangu. Her art has made her a renowned artist who has been honoured in different ways over the years. The commercialization and wealth creation using IK has been supported by the IKS policy of 2004, which has guided this study.

Regarding the commercialization of indigenous knowledge (Agan, 2013:29) wrote that:

Commercialization can improve the general economic status of indigenous communities, resulting in better health, sanitation, education, the standard of living, lowering of infant mortality, better food security, and nutrition, which can all result in a longer lifespan. Such communities need to be able to afford a good education for them to understand their ecosystem well. Scientists, conservationists, doctors, economists, business experts, and botanists should emanate from these communities.

Similar studies were also conducted by Levy (1990) who stated that the Ndebele art over the years has shown an expansion that has been influenced by the commercial market. The growth of this market has enabled women who are custodians to continue being gate-keepers of this knowledge while using it as a tool to survive. The popular Ndebele articles that are sold by custodians are beaded crafts such as the female attires and dolls. They also marketed for painted crafts, but this is not growing fast enough like the beaded articles. Levy (1990) has also noticed such an activity in the market of Ndebele articles. The scholar alluded that:

Today, Ndebele dolls have become prolific and popular items in the commercial market, and it is unlikely that too many dolls are made for personal use in association with fertility. The commercial market has also determined the presence of an increasingly wide range and variety of styles in the making of the dolls (Levy, 1990:65).

According to Mashiyane (2006), South African women who are artists can provide for their families and use some of the money generated from this work for other purposes. Even though many do not possess sophisticated skills of trading, over a few years, there has been a paradigm shift achieved by the appealing costs offered by purchasers of beadwork-items and also tourists who purchase these articles as souvenirs. Carey in an article distributed and altered by Sciana and Eicher (1998: 91) composes that:

Beadwork enables a woman to become a wage-earner, by making and wearing massive quantities of personal beadwork and posing for photographs (for a fee). Well, known are Ndebele of Southern Africa or the Maasai of Kenya...

The above citation shows obviously how a characteristic ability and social habit can be pivoted and be utilized as intended to put bread on the table. According to Whooper (1988), in recent years beadwork has also been made for sale in the urban areas or to visiting dealers, and in this way, women in very poor economic conditions have gained a small independent income.

According to Mashiyane (2006), there is a need for indigenous people especially elders to hire brand name officials who are part of the communities to prevent them from being exploited by 'outsiders' and capitalists. Brand name officials can be young people with a formal education background and interested in protecting the intellectual property of indigenous people. Levy (1990) stated that brand officials must be able to understand and have knowledge of what intellectual property is so that they can protect the indigenous knowledge of people. The majority of old people selling products from their indigenous knowledge have never received any formal education, it is unlikely for them to know their rights when it comes to intellectual property and benefit-sharing (Becker, 1979). The lack of information in such an aspect therefore makes the vulnerable indigenous people get exploited easily especially by "middlemen" or so-called "agents."

According to Whooper (1988), Levy (1990), and Mashiyane (2006) middlemen are the general population who have the necessary capital and grab the chance to create thriving businesses. They present a connection between the artists and the prospective purchasers of art. The middlemen are capable of convincing indigenous entrepreneurs such as Ndebele women to buy articles in bulk from them, on a huge discount then later inflate their mark-up margin, ending up with a massive profit. According to Levy (1990), that is nevertheless exploitation and the producers ought to be ensured by legislation about this sort of industry. Powell (1995) likewise saw that this sort of action was occurring among the Ndebele. As indicated by him this begun by:

... a nationwide self-help scheme which, during the early 1980s, identified the potential of Ndebele beadwork as a way of generating some kind of economy within the depressed areas occupied by the people. ...its representatives made beads available to the women, placed orders for saleable items, and then returned on the next round trip to collect the finished products for sale via the organization's local and international outlets (Powell, 1995: 120).

To avoid exploitation, the middlemen must follow protocols of benefit-sharing agreements before buying and accessing any indigenous products. The benefit-sharing agreement will ensure that the entrepreneurs are not taken advantage of and that they get rewarded handsomely for their intellectual property (Mashiyane, 2006). Alternatively, Pandor (2015) a former minister of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in South Africa agrees that a benefit-sharing agreement between the community and the third party must be concluded in case of gaining access to indigenous knowledge systems for commercial or industrial application and this is according to the IKS Act of 2019.

Presently, most entrepreneurs have managed to organize themselves better, managed to expand their businesses and the fruits of their hard labour. In her study on the economic value of beads among the Zulu people, Xulu, (2002: 18) observed that:

Some modern bead projects found, especially, in KwaZulu Natal are commercial in nature and rake in huge revenue for both the bead makers and mostly the "middle-man".

Vermeylen (2007), Wynberg, Schroeder, and Chennells (2009) researched the exploitation of indigenous people. Making an example of the San people, the scholars found out that the San have utilized the hoodia plant as a hunger suppressant for a long time, particularly during hunting expeditions where little food was accessible for a long time. In 1963, CSIR became aware of the plant's traditional use, from a 1937 paper by a Dutch ethnobiologist, and from San trackers who had worked for the South African military. During the 1980s, the CSIR resuscitated its enthusiasm for the plant and isolated its dynamic ingredient, a compound called P57, which at that point was patented in 1995. In 1997, the CSIR licensed P57 to a small British biotech organization, Phytopharm, which

conducted double-blind clinical preliminaries of the synthetic, affirming its hunger stifling qualities. In describing this case, Tellez (2008:3) wrote that:

A central problem in seeking an agreement with the CSIR to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from the P57 patented Hoodia products was the deficiencies in the South African legal framework for the protection of biodiversity and traditional knowledge. In the Hoodia case, it was difficult to assert the claims of the San people regarding the P57 patent and the future commercialization of Hoodia products because of the lack of a clear regulatory framework establishing their rights. The hardships suffered by the San people, that have in time have become dispersed and impoverished, also made it difficult for the community to assert their legitimate claims. Only recently, have the San been acquiring new land rights, and efforts are being made to recover their heritage and reunite the San population. These difficulties are exemplified by the fact that during the early stage of the negotiations for a benefit-sharing agreement the CSIR had argued that the San people no longer existed and hence they had not been consulted before the patent application for P57 nor had they tried to approach the San to negotiate any benefit-sharing agreement once the patent was granted.

Similar studies on the exploitation of indigenous people were also conducted by Fernando (2003) at Sri Lanka, an island country in South Asia who stated that indigenous people/villagers had a fear of foreign corporations taking control of their resources. These sentiments were politicized by both “radical” political parties—the Sinhala Urumaya (Sinhalese Heritage Party) and the Marxist-Leninist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (the People’s Liberation Front). They provided the villagers and the researcher with detailed information on the intrusion of multinational corporations into the area that took control of plants and species that hitherto were not marketable as well as how local populations lost control over their environments and cultures. They also pointed out that large sums of money as aid and the promises of better income fooled the people. With the interventions of NGOs, local elites, and the corporations, these foreign agents had consolidated their hold over the locals’ livelihoods based on traditional systems of knowledge.

This study recognized the commitment of researchers referenced in this section who have contributed with information on the commercialization of IK. Since an indigenous researcher completed this research, she has managed to gain in-depth knowledge about how AmaNdebele women can sustain their livelihoods using their art. According to Bell (2005), indigenous researchers approach indigenous communities in an acceptable traditional manner, they are familiar with the cultural group and social setting, indigenous people are usually happy to participate, freely share in-depth knowledge with people who understand (indigenous researchers) without fear of being judged, exploited and criticized (Bell, 2005).

### **Conclusion**

Ndebele women are entrepreneurs who sell their art to sustain their livelihoods. They have been able to eliminate poverty and grow their businesses over the years. Ndebele women are represented by brand name officials and managers who ensure that they are not exploited by capitalists. Previous studies conducted on this topic were reviewed to support the arguments made by the researcher. This study further reviewed the works done by Dr. Esther Mahlangu, which has included the recognition that she received in 2018.

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