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# **Indigenous knowledge system and practices for forest conservation in Vhembe region in Limpopo Province, South Africa.**



# Understating indigenous knowledge system

- No universally accepted definition
- Berkes (1993 p. 3), IKS “... as a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs **handed down through generations** by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment”.

Other terms that are used interchangeably

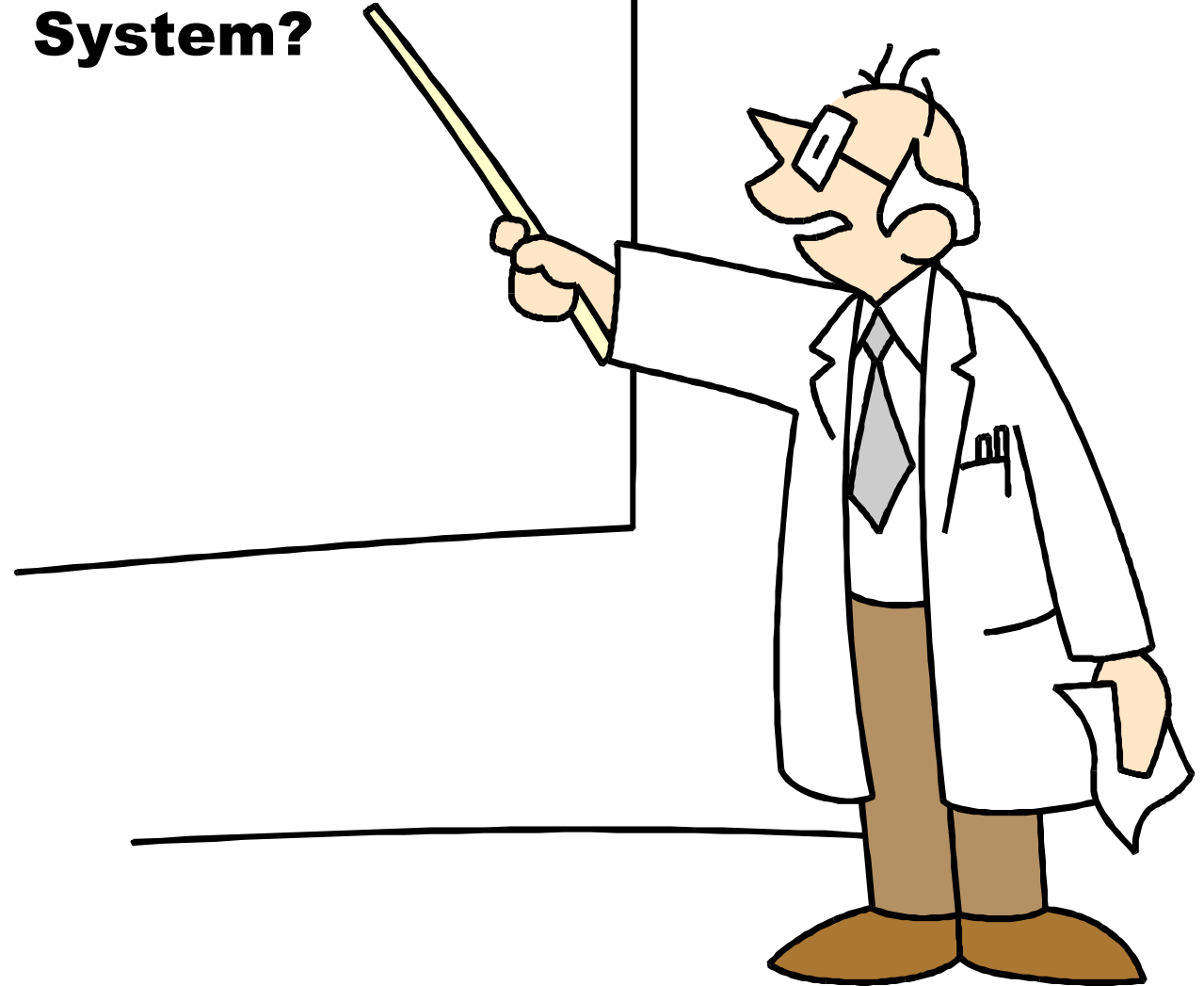
Traditional Ecological Knowledge	Peasants' knowledge
Traditional knowledge	Indigenous technical knowledge
Indigenous knowledge	Folk knowledge

- IKS is **dynamic, evolving, culturally embedded and contextually specific** (Boafo et al., 2016).
- IKS is rooted in **cultural and artistic practices** like cosmological beliefs, totem, proverbs, taboos, folklore and myths (Adom et al., 2016).

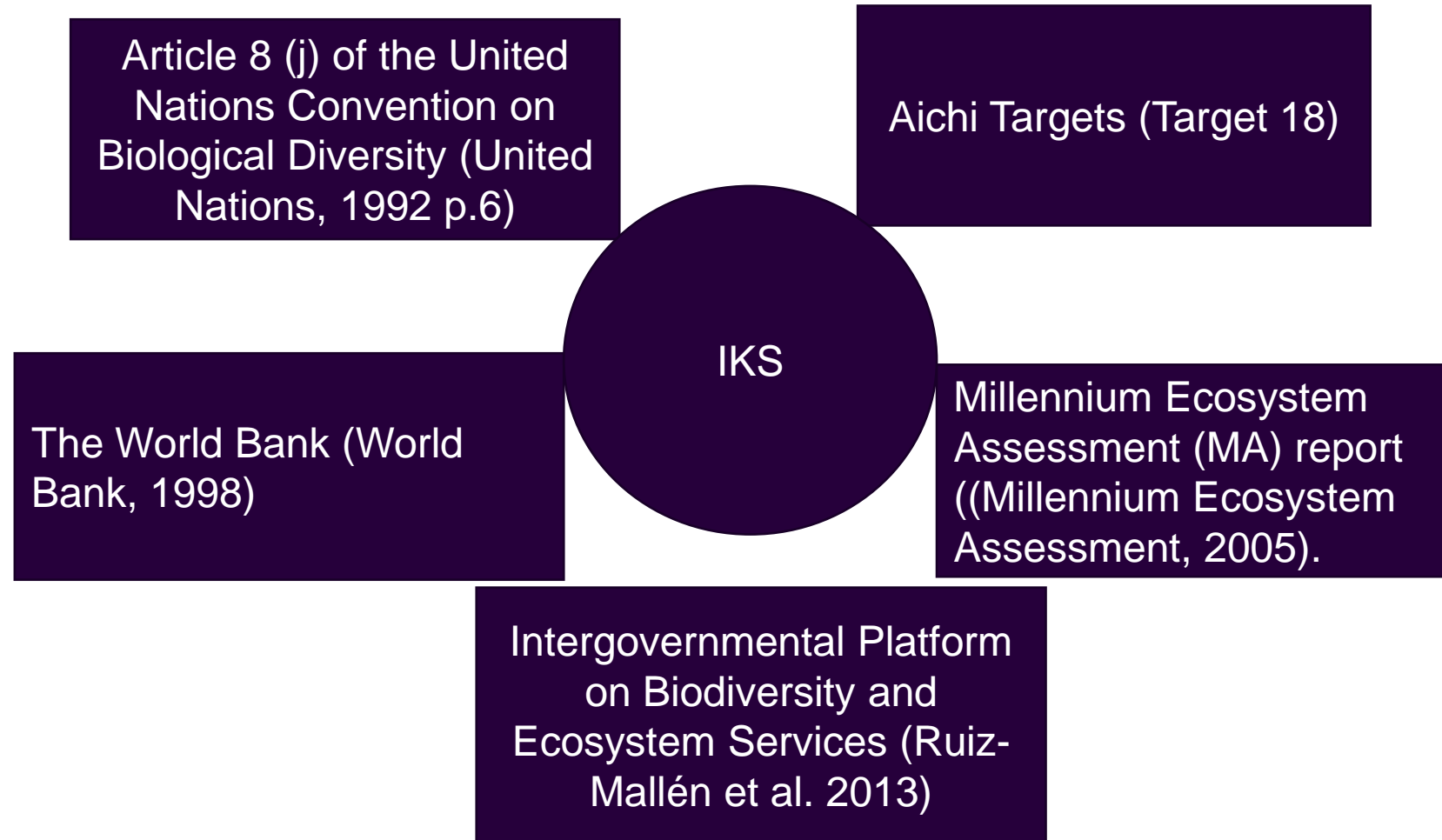


## Why indigenous Knowledge System?

- Simple and practical
- Restraint in resource exploitation
- Respect for nature (Encourage sustainable utilization of resources)
- Provides practical solutions to the environmental problems
- Links the survival of every human being to the wholeness of nature
- This knowledge is basic but provides a rich ground for the development of the modern society
- Flexible: IK is able to adapt to new conditions and incorporate outside knowledge



# International bodies recognizing IKS

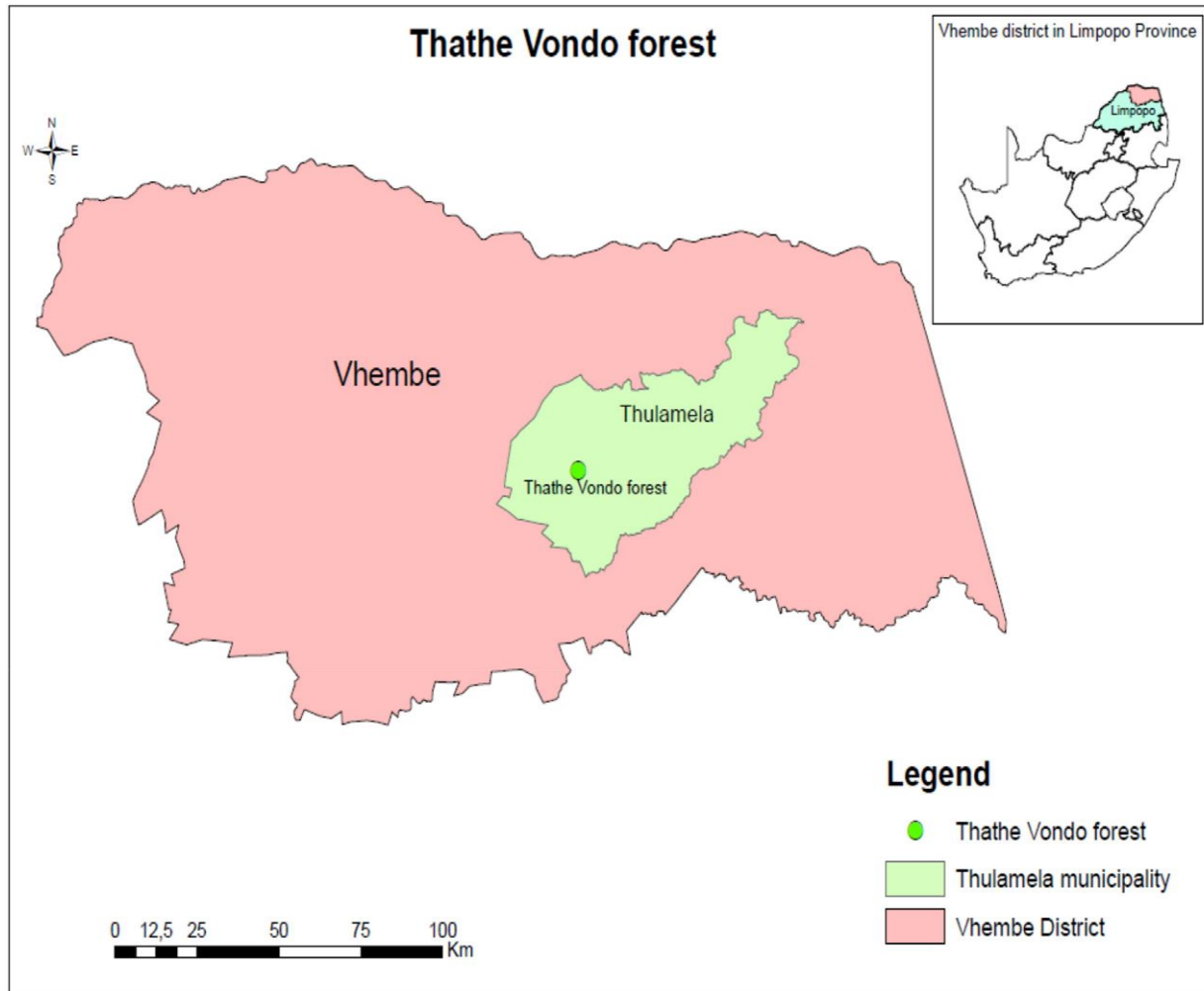


# Literature informing the study

- A wealth of studies have documented how TEK has contributed to forest conservation and management in various parts of the world including:
  - Zimbabwe (Mavhura and Mushure, 2019);
  - Ghana (Boafo et al., 2016; Osei-Tutu, 2017);
  - India (Ramakrishnan, 2007; Nimachow et al., 2011; Kandari et al., 2014);
  - Iran (Ghazanfari et al., 2004); and
  - Philippines (Camacho et al., 2016).
- Little is known in the context of SA



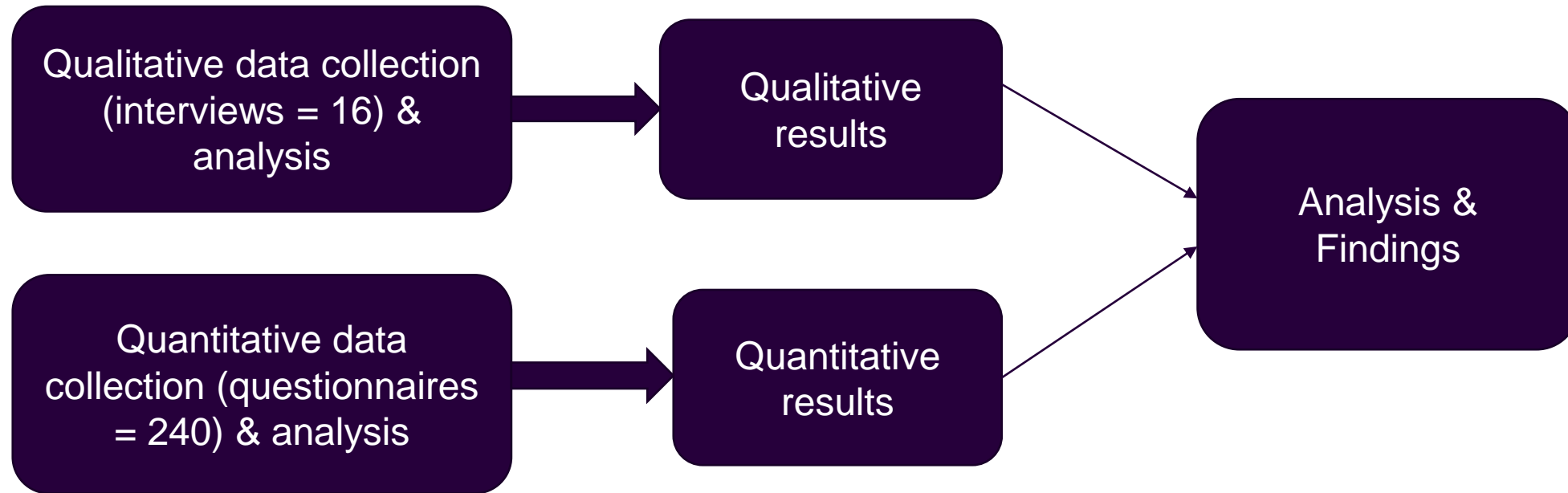
# Location, Aim of the study and argument



- The aim of this study was to identify and describe the key indigenous practices used to conserve/protect the forests and to examine the attitudes held by local communities regarding the value of IKS in forest conservation.
- The paper argues that despite that IKS is marginalized in the democratic SA, it play a key role in natural resource management or forest conservation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Thathe ‘Holy’ Forest – Vhembe -Limpopo-SA

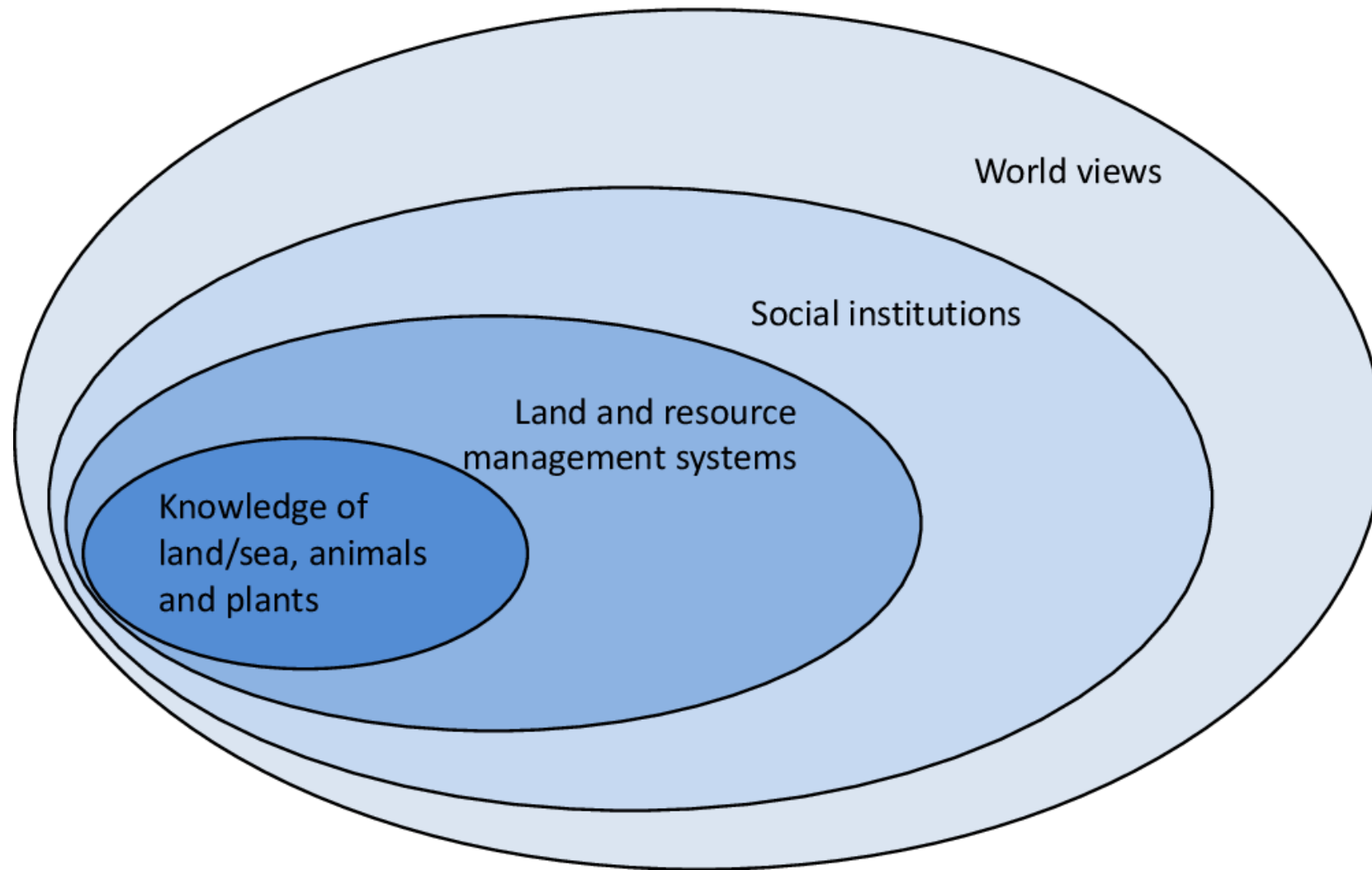


# Approach used





# Knowledge-practice-belief framework (Berkes, 1999)



# Key IKS for forest management practices



# Key IKS for forest management practices



- **Thathe- Sacred forest**
- **Tshidzivhe clan**
- **How is this forest protected?**

**Customs and rituals**

-Burial ground  
-Annual rituals



# Key IKS for forest management practices

## Myth

- “The spirit of chief Nethathe who appears in the shape and form of a **white lion guards** the graves and sacred forest in Thathe Vondo”.
- The white lion is believed to harm or devour trespassers, especially those not belonging to the Netshidzivhe clan.
- “A thunder and lightning bird called **Ndadzi** flies on the wings of thunder and protects the sacred forest”.

Wood turn into snakes



## Taboo



Retribution:  
blind, deaf, mad or disappear



# Key IKS for forest management practices



- **No hunting in sacred natural sites**
- **No cutting of trees**
- **No harvesting of medicine**
- **No off-drive allowed**
- **No hiking**
- **Seek permission from the chief for any activity in the sacred site**



# Key IKS for forest management practices

List of activities	Yes	No
Any form of deforestation at the sacred site		✓
Any kind of human disturbances at the sacred site		✓
Dense and tall trees at the sacred site as compared to the surrounding area	✓	
Evidence of harvesting of resources at the sacred forest		✓
Fence around the sacred forest		✓
Guards or field rangers at the sacred site		✓
People drive through the main road in the sacred site	✓	
Sign of off-road driving in the sacred site		✓



# Attitudes held by communities regarding the value of TEK in forest management

Attitudes questions	Percentages
Threats from wildlife coming from the forest	99.4% (n = 159), no negative impacts
When respondents asked if they happy to stay near a sacred site	98% = Yes Remaining were not sure
Source of energy in the household	6.9% (n = 11) used fuelwood, 8.8% (n = 14) used electricity, 83.8% (n = 134) used both fuelwood and electricity, and the remaining 0.6% (n = 1) did not specify.
When asked if there were rangers or guards from the tribal authority or government who guard against the collection of fuelwood and hunting	(95%; 152) = No  Remaining were not sure
When asked if they have ever hunted wildlife in the sacred site.	All respondents = No
IKS should continue to be used to protect natural resources	(93.1%; n = 149) = Yes Remaining were not sure
When informants were asked how they pass on the IKS to younger generations	(95%; n = 152) confessed that they no longer pass on the knowledge to their children



# Conclusion

- The aim of this study was to identify and describe the **key indigenous practices** used to conserve forest and to examine **the attitudes held by rural households** regarding the value of TEK in forest conservation.
- The study identified: **customs and rituals, taboo and myth, and rules and regulations.**
- Local communities = positive attitudes
- Positive attitudes are linked to obedience
- IKS should be part of primary and secondary school curriculum
- Talk shows on IKS on national radios and televisions are necessary

