



PROJECT INFORMATION

Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Change: Strengthening Adaptation Strategies in Traditional Healing Systems

Project Start Phase in Germany: April 15, 2026

Project End Phase in Germany: July 10, 2026

Project Start Phase in South Africa: July 27, 2026

Project End Phase in South Africa: October 30, 2026

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT:

The project represents a critical inquiry into the complex interactions between climate change, ecological degradation, and the sustainability of traditional and folk healing knowledge systems across generations.

It seeks to advance both scholarly understanding and practical interventions that safeguard intangible cultural heritage under growing environmental pressures. The main objectives are:

- to document and analyze the mechanisms of knowledge transfer in traditional healing systems
- to assess the direct environmental impacts of climate change on medicinal flora and related healing resources
- to examine the social and cultural disruptions that compound ecological challenges
- to identify adaptive and transformative strategies employed by knowledge holders, communities, and institutions in both countries to sustain their healing traditions



SDG/Themes: Good Health and Well-being; Quality Education; Climate Action; Partnerships for the Goals

Professional Fields (Category): Public Health, Medical Science, Nursing

The project is interdisciplinary and relevant to several professional fields:

- For the health and social sciences, the project offers points of contact in the fields of public health, traditional medicine, medical anthropology, nursing, and prevention.
- In the area of climate change and adaptation, it is aimed at professionals in environmental and resource management, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development.
- Furthermore, the project is important for development cooperation professionals, particularly in the areas of community work, resilience building, and participatory knowledge transfer.
- Experts in education, knowledge management, and capacity development also benefit from the results on integrating traditional knowledge into educational and training concepts.
- Finally, there are important links to policy advice and governance, as the project contributes to the dialogue between indigenous knowledge, climate policy, and sustainable health planning.

BACKGROUND:

When suffering from ailments, body and mind strive for healing and this cannot be found solely in conventional medicine, but often also in the wisdom and healing power of nature. This collaborative project explores the complex interrelationships between climate change, environmental changes, and the long-term sustainability of traditional healing systems. The focus is on how ecological changes such as the loss of biodiversity, the depletion of natural resources, and the shifting of ecosystems influence traditional healing knowledge and its application in Germany and South Africa.

Interviews with naturopaths, traditional healers, and healthcare professionals document changes in knowledge transfer, medicinal plant availability, and practical application. This comparative research project on community-based science, technology, and innovation systems provides opportunities for young researchers to contribute to the localization of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) and the African Union Agenda 2063 in line with cultural diversity, ecological responsibility, and sustainable health.

This project is right for you if you:

- enjoy exploring both traditional and alternative medicine,
- are strongly interested in environmental issues,
- are outgoing and good at connecting with people,
- enjoy intercultural engagement, and
- have a strong interest in research.

Akkon University of Applied Sciences in Berlin has been Germany's first university of applied sciences for human sciences since 2009 and is sponsored by the Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe e.V. (St. John Ambulance). It offers practice-oriented, interdisciplinary degree programs in nursing and medicine, education and social work, and civil protection and humanitarian aid. The project is based at the Institute for Research in International Assistance (IRIA), which conducts application-oriented projects worldwide in the fields of global health, humanitarian aid, and development cooperation.

In Berlin, you will work with colleagues at Akkon University of Applied Sciences with IRIA in:

- conducting research on folk medicine traditions in Germany,
- developing a comparative research design to compare German experiences with the indigenous healing systems of South Africa,
- designing questionnaires and conducting semi-structured interviews with local health professionals,
- collaborating with conservation initiatives dedicated to preserving medicinal plant species,
- presenting the results at public events,
- developing policy recommendations for biodiversity, and publications.

Please note that individual tasks may change before the project is implemented.

In Durban, you will work with colleagues at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in:

- data collection through semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders, such as traditional healers, community elders, and conservationists,
- observing traditional markets and sites where natural resources are gathered,
- investigating ecological features and disseminating the associated knowledge across generations,
- public outreach to disseminate project results,
- contributing to the development of a model that integrates the challenges of climate change and the mitigation strategies of local medical and healing systems,
- preparing concise reports for policymakers and other strategic stakeholders.

Please note that individual tasks may change before the project is implemented.

The project partner would prefer that you bring your own laptop.