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Chapter 8

Libraries and Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge in Developing Countries: The Nigeria Experience

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ABSTRACT

This chapter traces the role of libraries in the preservation of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in developing countries. It also highlights the nature of indigenous knowledge and the traditional role of libraries at preserving it for posterity; it discusses current issues surrounding the management of IK in libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions. It examines the various use of indigenous knowledge by array of information users within and outside the libraries. It x-rayed the traditional library services of identifying, acquiring, organizing, and presentation of IK to the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies. It concludes with the challenges in IK preservation and suggests measures that can be taken to alleviate the challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, libraries and archives are custodian of knowledge and cultural heritage; they hold drawings, paintings and other documentary artifacts, including manuscripts, records, books, audiovisual items, etc. These documentary resources have, until recently, consisted mostly of replicas of Indigenous peoples and their cultures by non Indigenous observers. IK has gained wider acceptance in the present global society and this has generated a lot of concern on the need to preserve and conserve it for the benefit of generations yet unborn. Different initiatives have been launched by both government and non-governmental organizations toward collection, preservation and dissemination of IK. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in its response to the need to properly preserve and disseminate IK to the human society recommended that libraries and archives should among other functions:

- Implement programs to collect, preserve, disseminate IK and local/traditional knowledge resources.
- Make available and promote information resources which support research and learning about IK and traditional knowledge, its importance and use in modern society;
- Publicise the value, contribution, and importance of IK and local traditional knowledge to both non indigenous and indigenous peoples;
- Involve elders and communities in the production of resources and teach children to understand and appreciate the traditional knowledge background and sense identity that is associated with IK systems;
- Urge governments to ensure the exemption from value added taxes of books and other recording media on IK and local traditional knowledge;

- Encourage the recognition of principles of intellectual property to ensure the proper protection and use of IK products derived from it (IFLA, 2004).

If libraries and information institutions subscribe to these recommendations, it would boost the level of awareness, access and use of IK in the modern time especially with the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This has revolutionized the way information is generated processed and disseminated. Corroborating this assertion, Christian (2009) stressed that one of the best modern approaches to preservation of traditional knowledge is documentation in some permanent form and public accessibility using information and communication technologies. It is in the light of this that this chapter intends to explore the role of libraries in the preservation of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in developing countries using Nigeria as a case study.

BACKGROUND

Libraries especially public libraries have been established with the aim of meeting the information needs of their immediate environment, through provision of information that are central to the needs of the people within and outside their community. This is reflected in the eleven core values of library as endorsed by the America Library Association, among which include: access, diversity, preservation, service and social responsibility. Together, these values address librarians' responsibility to meet the information needs of library users of all kinds by providing equitable access to a wide range of resources and services, and by supporting individual expression as a tenet of intellectual freedom. In another dimension, Byrne (2008) viewed archives, libraries, and museums as treasuries of Indigenous experience, knowledge and history. Libraries have long been crowned knowledge institutions as they provide the public

with spaces for information and learning. This space is accessible to all groups of society, regardless of gender, age and ethnic affiliation (IFLA, 2003) According to Salawu, (2010) libraries are potent instrument for creation, acquisition and dissemination of local content, thus preserving and promoting transmission of cultural practices and values from one generation to another. Many libraries recognize IK as an important source of developmental information. Nakata and Langton (2005) observe that the library and information profession has a lot to learn if they are to meet the information needs of indigenous people and appropriately manage IK. This may require libraries to move outside their comfort zone.

What is Indigenous Knowledge?

Indigenous knowledge (IK) can be defined as a systematic body of knowledge acquired by local people through the accumulation of experiences, informal experiments and intimate understanding of the environment in a given culture. (Rajasakeran & Arren, 1992). Nakata and Langton (2005), viewed IK as knowledge, innovation and practices of indigenous and local communities around the world, developed from experience over centuries, and adapted to the local culture and environment, transmitted orally from generation to generations. IK involves the "passing of knowledge from one generation to the next orally" (Hart, 1995). According to the World Bank Indigenous Knowledge Programme (n.d) IK refers to "the large body of knowledge and skills that embedded in culture and is unique to a given location or society.

Nature of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous information systems are dynamic, and are continually influenced by internal creativity and experimentation as well as by contact with external systems. Researchers in the area of IK have identified some special features of IK. Warren

(1991) identified the following as characteristic of IK:

- It is an important natural resource that can facilitate the development process in cost-effective, participatory, and sustainable ways.
- It is local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society.
- IK contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms.
- It is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural resource management, and a host of other activities in rural communities.
- Such knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, in many societies by word of mouth.
- IK has value not only for the culture in which it evolves, but also for scientists and planners striving to improve conditions in rural localities.

In another dimension, Mearns, Du Toit and Mukuka (2006) summarized characteristic of IK in follows ways:

1. IK is local, holistic, and Integrative because it is rooted in a particular community and its experiences are situated within broader cultural traditions of the people living in that place.
2. IK is essentially functional and is geared to practical response and performance.
3. IK is experiential rather than theoretical and is reinforced through continuous experience, trial and error.
4. IK is learned through repetition which aids in its retention and reinforcement.
5. IK is constantly changing by way of being produced and reproduced, discovered and lost.

6. IK is characteristically shared to a greater degree than other forms of knowledge, although its distribution is socially differentiated, based on gender and age.
7. The distribution of IK is always fragmented. It does not exist in its totality either in one place or one individual.
8. IK is tacit and cannot easily be codified.
9. IK is transmitted orally, or through imitation and demonstration and the process of codification may lead to the loss of some of its properties.

Collection and Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge

One of the primary functions of library and information institutions is collection development which is an aspect of the library practice that is responsible for selecting and acquiring information materials. The function of collection development unit in librarianship is the totality of acquiring relevant materials through several means that include purchase, gift, endowment, loan etc. The major source of acquiring materials into libraries is through purchase, however, not all procedures for acquiring other materials are applicable to IK collections because of the cultic belief attached. This is to say that not all IK materials can be purchased outright or may not even be available like books and other information materials on the book shelf. It is pertinent to note that the handling of many IK in Africa require oath taking and caution on its release to the third party. This often makes it difficult for libraries to acquire valuable IK materials. However, efforts have been made by various government and non-governmental organizations towards collection and preservation of IK. As part of functions of Centre for Indigenous Knowledge System (CEFIKS) which was established in the year 2000 in Ghana was to:

1. Record, preserve and disseminate information about IK system
2. Serve as a clearinghouse of IK system from various communities within and without Ghana
3. Support and advocate the use of IK systems in the socio-economic development in Ghana and the region of West-Africa (CEFIKS, n.d.)

Also, established for the collection and preservation of IK is Tanzania Development Gateway, which maintains IK database for Tanzania. (Tanzania Development Gateway, 2007). According to Jain (2008) IK can also be preserved by:

- Recording IK into audios, videos and other modern ICT media formats;
- Making the communities aware of the value of IK through storytelling, dances, plays etc.
- Assisting communities in documenting their local practices;
- Making IK available to the whole community;
- By protecting intellectual property rights so that IK is not misused and provides benefits to its originators.

Many global initiatives have been made toward preserving IK among which include:

- The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) also recommended that “oral tradition and IK in African communities should be exploited in all their forms of expression, giving cognizance to the protection of intellectual property rights” (United Nations, 2001).
- Agricultural Research and Training Project (ARTP) of the World Bank in Ethiopia focuses on farmer’s needs and priorities. It aims to: expand the network of research centres to cover the poorest marginal agro-ecological zones; improve agricultural research and its response to the needs and

priorities of small holder farmers by establishing and strengthening research-extension-farmer linkages and support establishment of an agricultural research fund (IFAD, 2007)

- The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Within the framework of the policy of sustainable human development adopted by the UNDP, issues related to indigenous people have gained considerable attention. Supporting and strengthening indigenous communities and organizations was taking stock of its work and its engagement with indigenous peoples and mapping out how best to move forward strategically over the next four years of the decade and beyond. (WIPO, 2001)
- Nigeria Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development (NIPRD) The Institute was established with the primary objective of developing drugs, biological products and pharmaceutical raw materials from indigenous resources as well as the conservation of Nigeria's medicinal and aromatic plants. The Institute currently has two main project which would result in further documentation of traditional medicine knowledge in Nigeria. The first is a nationwide ethno botanical survey which is being funded by the Nigerian government. The second is a World Bank project on survey of medicinal plants used to manage diabetes mellitus in Nigeria. (Christian, 2009)
- African Resources Centre for Indigenous Knowledge (ARCIK) it aims on multidisciplinary research and documentation in Africa's Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) it is specifically involved with search, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of Information on IKS affecting social, economic, political, cultural, and technological life of African societies. (Ojoo, n.d.)

Preservation of IK and Nigerian Experience

In most rural communities in Nigeria IK is the foundation for local decision making and this cut across all field of life such as agriculture, domestic cores, health care, education, climate change and other activities in the rural communities. The traditional believe in the creation, manipulation, transfer and dissemination of indigenous knowledge in various communities in Nigeria requires that such knowledge is exclusive to a particular family or Clan Also in the area of conflict and conflict resolution, many communities have different ways of resolving conflict, for example, kolanut and fresh palm wine is the key instruments of peace negotiation and conflict resolution in Igbo and Yoruba societies in Nigeria. Records of these cultural values are often not documented and this makes it difficult to be accessed within and outside the indigenous community.

The Dynamics of IK is often influenced by external influence especially the Western influence on IK in Nigeria has over time enhanced and in other cases forced such Knowledge to extinction. For instance, in the south western Nigeria the popularity of aso oke (Local hand weaved clothing) usually wear by celebrant at wedding, coronation, naming and other traditional events is now going into extinction due to popularity of western Lace, damask and other clothing materials that are not indigenous with their adverse effects on the economic status of Indigenous people and their heritage. If these activities were properly documented and disseminated over time their value and importance will continue to be recognized in the society.

Application of ICT in Preservation of IK

The advent of information and communication technology has opened up a new dimension into functions of libraries, and other informa-

tion institutions in their attempt to serve human community that was limited to a geographical entity to a community of the world without distance barrier, often referred to as global village. With this new technology, libraries are faced with challenges of not only meeting the needs of their immediate environment but also preserving and disseminating the information to the global community. Corroborating this assertion, Etim, (2009) stressed that traditional library functions of collecting, organizing, translating and preserving of rare books, archival documents, art collections and cultural heritage alone can no longer deliver the desired information demands of the present information society and that there is need for development of indigenous databases, targeted information packages and information literacy education. Information Technology, if properly harnessed has the capacity to preserve indigenous knowledge and disseminate it to generation yet unborn. Stevens (2008) posited that, the availability of digital technology has greatly expanded possibilities for preserving indigenous knowledge that are more sensitive to the unique characteristics of indigenous knowledge and the needs of indigenous communities, though the role of indigenous knowledge has long been misinterpreted or frowned upon in Africa. Packaging digital information is essential on both edges since it will reduce the axles being faced with numerous challenges of utilizing the technology as a result of low level of digital literacy and other associated encumbrances that include technical, tropical and administrative. On the other way round reduction of adapting indigenous knowledge to digital formats faces such hindrances that include compromise on the part of owner to agree to release their IK to a digital formats like micro filming, recording on video/audio tapes and photographing. Sturges and Chimseu, (1996) while commenting on Aboyade (1987) reported that information services providers should repackage information to forms acceptable by the local population.

Application of IK

Indigenous people over the years have been applying IK in major areas such as agriculture, medicine, conflict resolution, ecosystem and traditional attire.

In the agricultural sector, IK play significant role in environmental conservation. Some of the measures adopted by indigenous people in soil conservation include shifting cultivation, mixed cropping, intercropping etc. However, many of the approaches were peculiar to the local environments and cultures and could not be easily replicated elsewhere.

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine knowledge is that aspect of indigenous knowledge of people in local communities which relates to the use of plants and other natural resources in the treatment of health related conditions. (Christian, 2009) according to World Health Organization (WHO), 2002-2005) traditional medicine (TM) serves the health needs of almost 80% of people in developing countries, as other medical facilities are expensive and unaffordable by the common people. Some popular African traditional medicine practices include heat therapy, spiral manipulation, Quarantine, bone-setting, surgery and even HIV treatment.

In recognition of the vast potential of traditional medicine and its immense contribution to the continent's sustainable development in the wealth and well-being of her people, poverty alleviation, wealth and job creation, the African Union declared the period of 2001-2010 as the decade for African Traditional Medicine with a directive that research on African traditional medicine be made a priority. The main objective of the plan of Action of African traditional medicine is the recognition, acceptance, development and integration of Traditional Medicine by all Member States into the public health care system on the continent by 2010 (Christian, 2009).

Nigeria is one of the African nations that have adopted this initiative, and maintain specific institutions mandated to fast track the co-ordination of research and development, documentation and promotion of their traditional medicine, not only for improved healthcare delivery, but also for the immense job and wealth creation potentials. For example Nigeria Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development was established with the primary objective of developing drugs, biological products and pharmaceutical raw materials from indigenous resources as well as the conservation of Nigeria's medicinal and aromatic plants. According to Chritian (2009) The first major activity of the Institute following its establishment was the organization of an International Workshop on "Strategies and Priorities for Indigenous Pharmaceutical Research and Development" in October 1989. The body is responsible for verification of herbal medicine and Traditional Medicine Practitioners (TMP) who wish to have their traditional medicine recipe evaluated for efficacy and safety are expected to visit the institute for certification. This is usually the case where such TMP wish to have their traditional medicine licensed by the regulatory agency – the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) (Christian, 2009).

Conflict Resolution

IK can be applied to settle conflict closely bound with socio-political and economic realities of the life style of the communities for example the use of kolanut and the fresh palm frond is key instruments of peace negotiation and conflict resolution in igbo society (Jain, 2008)

Libraries and Promotion of Access to Indigenous Knowledge

Libraries and other information institutions in developing countries can facilitate easy access to indigenous knowledge in their communities

using various means of disseminating information at their disposal. In view of the oral nature of IK, libraries should find a way of documenting the cultural heritage of the indigenous people using the following methods:

- Public talk shows- libraries can organize talk shows involving traditional rulers, professionals in various vocations from different disciplines, including elders and young people in the indigenous community. Issues discussed in such environment can be documented using Audio and video tapes, CDs, or DVD and these can be preserved in library for present and future users.
- Partnership with organization in collection development- Libraries can collaborate with organizations dealing with collection of Indigenous knowledge in the publication of documented IK materials which can be made accessible to users.
- Collaboration with schools in IK preservation- Libraries should partner with schools that teach courses related to oral tradition and culture with a view to document cultural activities, oral history and tradition of their localities. These can be recorded in video or print format.
- Libraries can promote competition on documentary of indigenous technology, cultural attire and traditional songs. Participation in such competition can be extended to various indigenous communities giving criteria on how entries can be made using Audio, Video or print format. Participants could be motivated with prizes. A collection of IK made during such activities could be processed and made accessible to library users.
- Digitization of IK – Libraries should embark on digitization of IK materials to facilitate easy access, preservation and dissemination to wide library users via online.

Challenges of Indigenous Knowledge Preservation

- The nature of IK and the attitudes of their custodian in terms of information sharing constitute serious barrier to free access to IK materials.
- Collection of IK materials from various indigenous sources is laborious, costly and time consuming.
- Inadequate infrastructures constitute great problem in collection and preservation of IK.
- Lack of skilled support services, and inadequate training of staff in information access and retrieval.
- Lack of adequate policies that could enhance generation, promotion and use of IK in the modern time.
- Cultic nature of some IK has made not only their collection difficult but also their transmission.
- Dearth of research in the area of IK makes it difficult to have access to research findings.
- The developing nations of the world are still battling with the problem of digital divide which is affecting the level of awareness of valuable cultural heritage.
- The over reliance on the western knowledge is greatly affecting IK and if urgent step is not taken to address this, many of the valuable IK will face total extinction due to non use and lack of recognition in the society.
- Lack of legal frame work at national and international levels militate against library efforts to document and communicate indigenous knowledge.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The future research work should centre on nature and format of indigenous knowledge and how

the knowledge can be captured, processed and preserved using the modern information and communication technologies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The value of Indigenous knowledge in the present global era cannot be over emphasized, therefore, libraries and other information institutions charged with collection, preservation and dissemination of the abundant cultural heritage of the indigenous people should initiate programs that will promote access and use of IK.

IK collection and preservation is capital intensive, libraries can establish Indigenous knowledge and cultural resources unit with well trained staff to source and promote access to IK.

In line with the recommendation of IFLA on Indigenous Knowledge libraries and archives should work in cooperation with Indigenous communities to devise and implement programs to collect, preserve and disseminate resources on Indigenous knowledge traditions and to make available and promote information resources which support research and learning about Indigenous knowledge systems (IFLA, 2004).

In view of the overwhelming interest of the world in IK, Libraries, archives and other information institutions should prioritize the management of IK, and provide adequate fund for all the essential equipment and tools that will aid conservation and preservation of IK for the benefit of both present and generations yet unborn.

Application of information and communication technologies in the management of IK will further boost the accessibility of the valuable cultural heritage to the world and the indigenous people at large. Libraries and archives in the developing countries of the world should embrace the modern information communication technology for preservation and dissemination of IK. Efforts should also be made to persuade traditional institutions

and resource persons in indigenous communities to share IK with libraries for proper preservation and accessibility.

Governments and nongovernmental organizations should collaborate with libraries and provide fund for preservation and accessibility of IK using modern technologies. The issue of intellectual property right should be addressed in order to solve problem of ownership and copyright issue.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Archives: Institutions established to preserve and disseminate cultural heritage of a given society.

Indigenous Knowledge: Accumulated store of cultural knowledge that is generated and transmitted by communities from one generation to another.

Information and Communication Technology: The combinations of computer, software, networks, satellite links and related systems that allow end users to create, process, analyse, access, and exchange data, information and knowledge.

Libraries: Institutions established to acquire, process, preserve and disseminate information sources in various format.

Preservation: The act of conserving knowledge for present and future use.

Traditional Cultural Expression: is cultural identity of people and way of life expressed in traditional ways. These expressions include, but are not limited to: music and song, stories, symbols, dances, rituals, architecture etc.