

The Role of the Library in The Acquisition, Preservation, And Dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Heritage in Nigeria

¹Dr. Wahab Akanmu Aboyade, ²Oladapo O. Adeyemo

¹Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

²Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

*Corresponding Author: ¹Dr. Wahab Akanmu Aboyade

ABSTRACT: The paper, a prose literature type, examines the role of library and information professionals in the acquisition, preservation and dissemination of rich culture and indigenous knowledge in Nigeria. It further stresses the importance of protecting and preserving the rich cultural heritage for the posterity. The paper further identifies poor funding and lack of awareness among stake holders in the preservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge, among others, as some of the challenges militating against proper preservation of IK. The paper recommends among others, proper documentation of IK by the librarians and other information professionals for the benefit of posterity and to safeguard its extinction.

Keywords:- Indigenous knowledge, Library; Librarians, acquisition; preservation; dissemination, Nigeria.

I. CONCEPT OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

The term indigenous refers to when something is local or native to a particular group of people in a society. Knowledge on the other hand refers to cognition, skills, and information learnt or experienced which an individual makes use of in tackling issues. Knowledge is a dynamic human process of justifying personal beliefs towards the truth (Nonaka, 2006). Therefore, indigenous knowledge or IK refers to distinctive values, ideas and ways of doing things, skills and local occupation in a particular territory and ethnic grouping.

Indigenous knowledge is the knowledge that a particular set of people, living in a community develop over a period of time and such knowledge has provided such communities sustainable development and improvement (Sarkhel, 2016). Indigenous knowledge also known as traditional knowledge, local knowledge and rural people's knowledge refers to the common ability of a particular group of people in a society mostly in rural areas who have a common history that forms basis of their local level decision making of their everyday affair including occupation, health care, Agriculture, food preparation and social life.

IK is different from western or scientific knowledge, western knowledge is generated by research institutions and universities which is well documented (Kaniki, 2002) while IK is developed outside the formal educational system and it is transferred orally. IK is unique to a particular community and such knowledge found in that community is used as an identity of that community (Sen, 2005), such knowledge is learnt through repetition which brings about retention and then experience. IK can either be tacit or explicit. While explicit can be easily articulated and expressed and recorded, tacit knowledge refers to personal experience.

II. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Culture can be defined as the sum total of values beliefs, practices habits and norms of a particular group of people inherited, learnt and acquired which is passed down from generation to generation. The distinctive culture of a people is stored in individuals' minds and passed on from generation to generation. IK on the other hand refers to innovations and practices of local communities around the world which bring about development and improved standard of living passed on from generation to generation and adapted into their daily lives. Examples of cultural heritage of a community include songs, festivals, rituals and traditional dances peculiar to a particular community, norms, customs, beliefs, cultural values, community laws and local language. IK is more of a practical concept born out of the ideas of people of a particular society, examples of

such traditional knowledge and practices include health practices and remedies, handcraft, designs and artworks, traditional agricultural methods.

IK can neither be tangible or intangible. Ndovu (2015) asserts that, intangible knowledge can also be called living heritage or living culture. IK and culture are collectively owned, not by a single individual. A society or community is unique and different from other communities because of its unique cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge which the people of the community abide by and identify themselves by them.

Culture is the way of life of a group of people living together having a common pattern and history with similar ways of thinking, feeling and acting which is passed on from generation to generation through stories, songs, proverbs and folklore which form the basis for world diversity. Culture can be imbibed through immersion and teaching.

The United Nations declaration draft on the rights of indigenous people stated that, they should have the right to make use of their language, tradition, philosophy and their unique history and pass them onto generations to come and also keep their personal names and names of their communities. Stevens (2005) stated that indigenous knowledge has become neglected because of the more appealing and well documented modern and western knowledge which is more and easily accessible to users. Stevens (2005) further went ahead to state that, Librarians are also more focused on these western and modern information and knowledge at the expense of traditional/indigenous knowledge and values.

III. THE NEED FOR PRESERVATION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

The advent of western colonisation brought indigenous knowledge to an all-time low in Africa, and this has made the local knowledge to appear inferior to the western way of doing things. Cultural heritage, values and ideas of a particular place are being lost and forgotten. This has led to the need to preserve IK so that the rich local knowledge and ideas would be kept safe for generations to come. It is a known fact that, communities lived sustainably before the introduction of western knowledge and educational system. Arguably, western culture and traditions confounded the indigenous knowledge and further disrupted the local people's ways of doing things. Presently there is a risk of IK being lost and together with it, the rich knowledge and cultural heritage of the local communities. (Nakashima, 2000)

Indigenous knowledge is information and it is very essential in the development of an individual, community and thenation at large. Oyeronke (2012) affirms that access to information is essential to corporate, educational advancement and individual development. IK is very important because local people's means of survival depends greatly on it. The loss of traditional knowledge and no proper records of knowledge have resulted to mass migration to more developed communities which eventually may lead to total extinction of knowledge. This is so in that, the knowledge which is unique to that community would not be passed on from generation to generation. Furthermore, the influence of western culture has negatively affected the transmission of individual knowledge. For instance, traditional attire (aso-oke or aso-ebi) which is a source of living for the people producing them is being replaced by European dressing like suits, shirts, ties as well as other fabrics like lace materials. The source of economic wealth to communities producing such textile materials and garments would be at a low level. Other examples include communities producing pots, pottery and other utensils, woven baskets and locally made shoes and bags. Most of the local communities in African countries depend on indigenous agricultural practices where majority of the food produced comes from traditional farming.

IV. DOCUMENTATION, ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Local communities make use of traditional medical practices where extracts from plants and animals have been carefully selected to treat ailments and diseases. According to Adeleja (2006), it is estimated that 85% of Nigerians make use of traditional medicine in treating diseases like malaria, diabetics, epilepsy and sickle cell disorders. It is then of utmost importance that, such indigenous knowledge should be documented, organized and kept for the benefit of mankind. Librarians with their knowledge of information management can organize indigenous knowledge that is going into extinction into properly documented and well organized and arranged information. Documentation of IK solves the major problem of local communities.

A wide range of indigenous knowledge can be documented as a source of valuable information for the community so that generations to come can make use of such information and also for the nation at large. Sarkhel (2011) brought up some notable examples of knowledge that can be documented and organized in the library. They include seed treatment and storage methods in farming, bone setting and natural method of treatment of diseases in healthcare, mat making, pottery and textile in handcrafts. Examples of cultural practices which can be documented include beliefs like religious festivals and ceremonies and lastly performing arts.

Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices are available in different forms, while some are in pictures and in work of art, some are in songs, poetry folklore and theatre which are often communicated orally and they

reveal values and history of the people. Hence, there should be proper and effective documentation of such information, knowledge and culture.

For easy retrieval, it is best to organize indigenous knowledge effectively. Onyango (2002) posited that when local knowledge has been acquired and documented, it must be efficiently organized with standard indexing terms which can be achieved through an in-house indexing policy.

Documentation of IK is also important so that an individual or community would not lay claim to someone else's work. For instance, an indigenous person can lay claim to an herbal remedy to an illness or disease. Libraries need to be proactive and encourage community publishing. Iwoga (2011) stated that, if knowledge is not properly managed and documented, others would take ownership of innovation and skills meant for the local people.

Documenting local knowledge is always a challenge because of its oral nature where information is always passed and learnt orally. Indigenous knowledge can be documented in various forms which include reports on how ceremonies and festivals are performed, inventories which includes natural medical remedies, the kind of diseases they treat and how they are prepared. Other forms of documenting local knowledge include maps, recorded video clips and drawings. According to Anand (2009), the problem with managing IK is the mode of communication. The common mode of communication is oral which in the process, vital information may be lost.

V. THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY IN ACQUIRING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Libraries hold an integral position in preserving knowledge, ideas, facts and innovation useful for the development of a society and nation at large. The library provides a platform where information can be accessible to users of such information. The major problem affecting the local or traditional knowledge is the failure of libraries and other information centres to identify it as an essential and vital source of information for national development. Library is the pillar of the knowledge and culture meant to be passed from generation to generation. To prevent a loss of knowledge and information, the library preserves such knowledge for future generations to come.

Library has a role in managing IK, in that it serves as depositories, collectors, organisers, mediators and distributors of indigenous knowledge. The library makes such knowledge and information available for the users. (Nakata, 2002). The library should be ICT compliant so as to ease preservation, organization, accessibility and visibility of indigenous knowledge. A well organized and preserved knowledge would be available for use for generations to come. Plockey (2014) opined that digitizing information makes it easier to preserve, access, and share so as to protect the community's collective memory. A digitized document would be available for all users anywhere in the world instead of having to be physically present in a particular community where such information is kept. Breytenbach (2013) is of the view that, indigenous resources would become extinct and unavailable in future if such resources are not digitized now. Through the use of ICT, there would be a proper accessibility and dissemination of indigenous knowledge to people which would bring about a paradigm shift of local people from being consumers of information and knowledge to producers (Tjiek, 2006). As a result, it improves the standard of living of such people and on a larger scale the economy of a nation.

In a conference of African Union (AU) heads of states, a declaration was made that, African countries should prioritize ICT so that digitizing IK would be made possible. A well digitized knowledge would bring about knowledge sharing which is important for the development of societies in Africa (Chisenga, 2002). ICT is important to IK in this present period because the main platform for information access is through the ICT facilities like computers, internet and so on.

VI. PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS IN PRESERVING AND ACCESSING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

The major problem associated with preserving indigenous knowledge in libraries is inadequate funding. Information centres generally are lowly funded because it is given low priority by the government and not regarded as a money generating organization for a nation. Another problem is the issue of illiteracy, most of the people in local communities are not educated, this is always a problem because they don't get to document and record inventions, discoveries and ways of doing things. Many local communities are always reluctant to divulge information about the knowledge practices and ideas such as medical practices, agricultural practices and so on. They believe divulging such information means revealing secrets of how things they hold dearly are done. Such people prefer to teach their children orally so as to continue whatever it is after they are gone.

Furthermore, there is the problem of lack of awareness of the need for indigenous information. Most people don't get to appreciate the value of indigenous knowledge. They prefer the western ways of doing things, from the western ways of dressing to western medicine and other foreign made food and products. Also, most people do not believe that indigenous knowledge can be a source of livelihood, provide sustainable development to communities and bring about national development for the nation at large.

The distance between the libraries and communities where information about indigenous knowledge is needed is quite far. Most of the libraries are not located in the remote areas of the nation, this creates a problem of accessing information and knowledge organized in the library. Mode of transportation in most of these local communities is mostly by trekking which inhibits accessibility and availability of vital information and knowledge. Another problem in preserving indigenous knowledge is incompetency of staff. According to Issak (2009), it is important to train staff so as to equip them to meet the information needs of individuals and community at large. Staff of libraries and information centres should be trained on how to document, organize, preserve and disseminate indigenous knowledge efficiently.

Also, majority of indigenous, cultural and historic materials are old which can be damaged due to its life span. The indigenous materials are not properly preserved, and as such, they are prone to deterioration, consequently leading to loss of vital information. Most of the materials are historic and cultural with limited or singular copies of such materials available for accessibility. Other problems associated with the preservation and accessibility include absence of representation of indigenous knowledge in library's collection development policy and lack of indexing policies in the library.

Role of librarians in acquisition, preservation, and dissemination of indigenous knowledge

It is the job of librarians to develop new tools and techniques in order to meet the needs of information knowledge users (Anwar, 2010). Librarians must ensure that no indigenous knowledge is lost by preserving the information which is mostly transmitted orally by documenting and organizing the information (Ngulube, 2002). He further stressed that librarians in acquiring, preserving and disseminating IK can perform functions like: preparing inventories and registers of IK systems; making IK accessible to communities through marketing strategies; developing standard tools for indexing and cataloguing IK systems; and lastly, compiling bibliographies of IK resources. In acquiring indigenous knowledge, the most widely used methods include interviews, observations and field works.

Librarians have a role to play by promoting indigenous knowledge, by highlighting its role and the importance it plays in communities and in the nation at large. Previously, local knowledge has always been stored in the minds of individuals. Apart from text documentation, local knowledge can be stored electronically and also preserved by creating a community-based web portal which can allow sharing of knowledge, collaboration, adding of more content, ideas and knowledge among users for the benefit of all. An electronic database of knowledge would be available for communities for generations to come.

Librarians must also be skilled in providing information services for rural communities. According to Odongo (2003), African librarianship is faced with the problem of having few local publishing facilities which affect the documentation of indigenous knowledge.

The most efficient way of disseminating information is through the ICT but since most communities are faced with the problem of internet connectivity, networking and other electronic facilities such as computer hardware and software and other peripheral devices, the local communities would be left out. As a result of these, recorded video tapes, pamphlets and magazines in their local language can be made available for them. Also, workshops can be organized from time to time for those communities.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Indigenous knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, most of them orally which results to loss of information, facts and truth. IK is not recognized and valued for its role in sustaining the livelihood of millions of people globally and for its potential for innovation.

IK is valuable not only to those who depend on it in their daily lives as a source of income but also to information users who make use of IK. Modern industries and agriculture depends on traditional knowledge which they rebrand and repackage. Many widely used products such as plant-based medicines, cosmetics and soaps are produced from traditional knowledge.

It is imperative for librarians to do a proper documentation in order to preserve the current fragile state of IK. It is also important to be documented for the protection of intellectual property right. Cultural heritage needs to be preserved, because it brings us closer to our social value which eventually culminates in unity and sense of belonging in a community. A well preserved cultural heritage will bring about a well-preserved history for generations to come which also makes people to know about facts, history and their roots and also learn something about the past.

Information centers should be funded and supported appropriately by the government because, information empowers individuals and generally improves the economic status and standard of living of a community and nation at large. It is of utmost importance for libraries to go out to under-privileged communities to teach them and show case information materials in their collection that might be of importance to the communities. This is done majorly through book fair and book exhibition.

Libraries should be detailed and do an expansive work in retrieving indigenous materials so as to provide exactly what individuals and communities will need for personnel and national development. Also, librarians should be trained and retrained so as to be fully equipped in acquiring, processing, preserving and disseminating information for the benefit of information users. Personnel developmental programs should also be organized.

Librarians should work together with ethnographers, botanist, zoologist, oral historians, anthropologists and other related professionals in developing collection development policies so as to have a rich collection, for proper documentation and organization and for an efficient dissemination of information. Also, library centres should be built in local communities for accessibility of information. Libraries can also go out to share knowledge and information in the local communities.

IK should be carefully looked into by the government where issues on documentation, preservation and accessibility need to be properly addressed. Also librarians should develop library acquisition policies that would promote indigenous knowledge so as to acquire and preserve indigenous local African knowledge for the use of all information users which can be kept in the Africana section of the library in book, journal, pictorial and digital form.

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***Corresponding Author: ¹Dr. Wahab Akanmu Aboyade**
¹Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.