

Chapter 10

Indigenous Knowledge as Resource to Poverty: Reduction in Rural Areas

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the ways in which African rural youths and women seek opportunities to innovate and adapt indigenous knowledge as a locally developed resource of community resilience in the attempt to reduce household poverty. Two case groups are discussed in this chapter, and both engaged in self-employment enterprises. The groups drew upon their ecological and cultural knowledge, enabling themselves through shoestring budgets to sustain their livelihood and community wellbeing. The chapter shows that unemployment affects young people and rural women from all occupations and ethnic groups, a situation that puts them in a vulnerable and precarious living condition and possibly in poverty trap. The analysis showed that for most of youth found on the Tanzania's streets and urban municipalities, a secondary education has not proven useful in practical knowledge, skills, values, or attitudes necessary to enter the world of work or to become self-employed.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter draws analysis from a case study of African youth and women's emerging self-mobilized social learning processes in the recollection and application of agricultural knowledge to overcome household poverty. In this example, the youth draw upon their cultural knowledge as a resource of community resilience by enabling themselves to sustain their livelihoods and community wellbeing. Concurrently, local knowledge can serve as a resource of desperate members of the local community by drawing on resilience that enables people to sustain their livelihoods and adapt to new economic realities (Shava, et al., 2010).

This chapter highlights examples of use of local knowledge as a potential resource to reduce poverty. Youth and women can draw upon this knowledge to enhance community's capacity to deal with poverty and other uncertainties. First, the introductory section scans the macro-dimensions of rural poverty and

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use of local knowledge as potential resource to overcome poverty and solve problems. The subsequent section discusses the relatedness of self-employment and poverty alleviation efforts in Tanzania. The third section introduces two examples of how local communities namely, Bodaboda Boys and *Jitahidi* Women in various ways have engaged to reduce household poverty. These examples confirm that the way we view and understand the world around us is uniquely shaped by attitudes, values, and beliefs acquired over the course of our lives. Every situation we encounter, every experience we acquire, directly contributes to our ways of knowing and being, namely, our worldview and epistemology: the way we come to know what we know and embrace it as valuable resource to solving our existential problems.

The lessons of this chapter draw from secondary and survey data collected from rural youth and women in Tanzania. These two groups engaged in self-employment to alleviate household poverty. This is important because today's experts, advocates, educators, policymakers, researchers, and theorists are grappling with new and changing understandings of the causes of poverty, and priorities to overcome incidences of poverty traps (Bagachwa, 1994; Carter & Barrett, 2006; URT, 2015). As explained in Chapter 1, the term "poverty" has overtime gained many meanings, suggesting diverse, and sometimes, conflicting priorities for action. We made distinctions between economic or financial poverty, relative poverty and extreme poverty. We pointed out first, economic poverty to denote primarily to financial poverty that reflected insufficient or low incomes and per capita consumption (Carter & Barrett, 2006; Ravallion, 2001). Second, relative poverty (meaning subjectively experienced poverty) is a potentially crucial determinant of political identity, organization and action (Cooskey, 1994; Foster, 1998). This chapter builds on these definitions and development work that addressed locally developed "resource-use practices" in overcoming poverty.

"FALL BACK" ON INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE TO REDUCE HOUSEHOLD POVERTY

People who face uncertainty in life or in their local communities, frequently *fall back* to what they still know or have known for years, to understand, manage, or even overcome uncertainty or a lack of knowledge (Hornidge & Antweiler, 2012). This "*fall back*" could be substantial knowledge for survival, such as knowledge of cassava diversity or innovative ways of mixing grains with cassava to make food last longer in times of drought. Such survival knowledge, also known as indigenous knowledge, is cherished by communities in many regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. Historically, and for many millennia, the ecological knowledge about plants, diseases, foods, and many other arrays of things central to the lives of indigenous peoples, was held by specific groups of people and cherished by their local ecosystems (Olsson & Folke 2001).

Over time, Indigenous knowledge is an idea enjoyed and found in many local communities in rural areas garnered from past experiences. Such knowledge continues to be aggregated by these communities over generations, reflecting many years of experimentation and innovation in all aspects of life. Indigenous knowledge is uniquely valuable, as it provides insights and treasured information that directly reflect the traditions, opinions, family values, beliefs, epistemologies (i.e., ways of being, learning, and doing) and attitudes of the local people collectively engaged in community wellbeing and survival initiatives (Semali, 2015).

Today, global change and human impacts on biogeochemical processes may lead to unexpected ecological effects with consequences for the production potential of agroecosystems all over the world

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