

Chapter 20

Conceptualizing the Knowledge of Traditional and Indigenous Communities Using Informetrics Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Interest in indigenous knowledge is growing because of its potential to promote and sustain development activities. In spite of the recognition of the significance of indigenous knowledge there is limited agreement on its definition and conceptualization. There are competing ways of defining it and various ways of labeling it. In view of the varying appropriation of meanings to the concept of the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities, this chapter starts by dealing with definitions attached to the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities before turning to establishing what might be the suitable label for that knowledge using informetrics techniques. An investigation of 17 labels used to refer to the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities that were conveniently chosen from the extant literature revealed that indigenous knowledge is the label that is gaining more currency than any other in the arts, humanities, and social sciences subject categories.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT¹

Research on the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities can be traced as far back as to the work of anthropologists, but it was not until the publication by Brokensha, Warren and Werner (1980) that the literature and the discourses on the subject started to grow noticeably. Brokensha, Warren and

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Werner (1980) made the concept of indigenous knowledge (IK) and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) with reference to the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities (KTIC) prevalent. The publication coincided with an increased interest in researching and using indigenous knowledge.

There are various reasons for the growth of interest in the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities, particularly in sub Saharan Africa (SSA). Some of which include (Breidlid, 2009; Briggs & Sharp, 2004; Kothari, 2002; Mathias, 1995; Ngulube, 2002; Ngulube & Onyancha, 2011; Sillitoe, 1998):

- An implicit recognition of indigenous knowledge as a possible alternative to promoting development in underdeveloped rural communities;
- The loss of the universal dominance that Western scientific knowledge enjoyed as it became recognised as an equal among other knowledge systems;
- The realisation of the fact that IK is an economic and cultural asset of indigenous and local communities and their countries;
- The change in attitudes of many social and natural scientists towards indigenous people and their knowledge; and
- The recognition of the danger of the disappearance of IK as a result of the death of its custodians, and the erosion of indigenous languages and cultures by various factors.

Although the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities is recognised as essential for the emancipation, empowerment and affirmation of marginalised societies, there is limited agreement on its definition and the most appropriate label for the knowledge. In other words, there are competing ways of defining it and various ways of labeling it. In view of the varying appropriation of meanings to the concept of the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities, this chapter starts by clarifying its meaning before turning to establishing what might be the appropriate label for that knowledge using informetrics techniques.

DEFINITIONS OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF TRADITIONAL AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Table 1 shows that there are many definitions provided by many players in the IK landscape. However, many of these scholars are agreed that most of the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities was developed through the interaction of human beings with the natural environment in order to sustain themselves. The interaction led to the evolution of practices, values, ideas and principles that contributed to their survival, control of their life and sustainable development. Table 1 gives some of the selected definitions from the extant literature to illustrate the extent of agreement or the lack of it. Various names of this knowledge also emerge out of these conveniently selected definitions.

The definitions in Table 1 demonstrate that the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities have common features. Most of these features are well-documented in the extant literature (Dutfield, 1999; Ellen & Harris, 1996; Mawere, 2014; Ngulube, 2002; Ngulube & Onyancha, 2011; Ossai, 2010; Senanayake, 2006). Thus, KTIC is:

- Rooted in a particular community and situated within a broader social context whereby all life-forms are a result of the interaction between social and spiritual relations;

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