

## Chapter 24

# The Role of Indigenous Knowledge System in African Development

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines the relevance of Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) for African development, using qualitative data. The findings revealed that wholesale adoption of foreign ideas has rendered Africans subservient in the world, despite their rich cultural heritage. This situation promotes substitution of IKS, the foundation of African progress, thereby creating more problems for Africans. Yet, IKS still provides succour for the majority of Africans. The emerging culture of individuality and nuclear family is not realistic in Africa where social structures largely reflect kinship solidarity and communalism sustained by social capital, which has become widely recognised. It is therefore suggested that Africans should revise their local circumstances to prevent further plunder of Africa. Also, there is urgent need for adaptation of African IKS to modern reality because the conditions that sustained it have been modified. Rather than focus on wholesale adoption of western remedies, Africans need to explore their IKS to promote common understanding in the context of contemporary globalisation. Africans at home and those in the Diaspora should utilise their abundant natural resources and human capital to repair the dented image of Africa. An upgraded version of African IKS can drive and sustain this mission.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Africa has attracted attention, although it remains underdeveloped given its records of violent conflicts, dictatorships, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, unemployment, poverty, lack of social security, brain drain, and low life expectancy. This situation reflects disorganisation and imperialism in which African societies were relegated to embrace western values despite their rich cultural heritage (Akinwale, 2010). It is reported that Africans require foreign direction to ensure socioeconomic development (Lauer, 2007). Alternatively, African development initiatives were evidenced by folklore and other forms of indigenous

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knowledge system (IKS) such as language, proverbs, poetry and novels (Gencarella, 2009). The foregoing warrants satisfactory answers to the following questions: Why has Africa been underdeveloped despite its status as the cradle of humanity? Where is African IKS heading? What can Africans do to recover and upgrade their IKS? How can African IKS enhance development in Africa?

These questions embody several ideas regarding development of African societies; hence they are examined through analysis of primary and secondary qualitative data. Studies have shown that Europeans' inadequate knowledge of African IKS fueled several misconceptions that resulted in colonisation of Africa (Akinwale, 2010; Rashidi, 2009; Rodney, 1972). Also, African leaders that could have promoted IKS became representatives of colonial administrators, thereby contributing to the decline of local wisdom in Africa. This paper therefore examines the role of IKS in African development, as shown in this paper.

## **Materials and Methods**

Both primary and secondary qualitative data were used to examine the relevance of IKS for African development. The primary data were generated from African societies through several years of participant observation. The data from participant observation were integrated with data from reliable documents such as journals and textbooks. Both data were processed via thematic content analysis and ethnographic summary in line with Grbich's (2007) model of qualitative data analysis. Also, the data analysis was based on the social construction of reality espoused by Berger and Luckmann (1966) with appropriate interpretation of African IKS.

## **Reasons for Underdevelopment of African Societies**

Societies are classified as developed or underdeveloped depending on their levels of technological advancement and degree of involvement in agriculture. While developed societies largely concentrate in Europe and north America, the majority of the underdeveloped societies occupy Africa, Asia and Latin America. Scholars confirmed Africa as the cradle of humanity (Oke, 2006; Keita, 2004; Massey, 2002). For Massey (2002, p. 7), "Fully modern human beings emerged in Africa somewhere around 150,000 years ago and rapidly migrated outward to occupy all corners of the globe." This fact was corroborated by Keita (2004, p. 1) thus:

*The consensus of the majority of researchers in evolutionary anthropology and palaeontology is that the biological species Homo originated in the general area consisting of the eastern and southern portions of what is now known as Africa. It is also recognized by some researchers, the multi-regionalists, that migratory Homo subspecies defined as Homo erectus migrated from Africa's northeast quadrant to populate other parts of the globe now defined as the continents of Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Americas. (Keita, 2004, p. 1)*

This implies that Africa predates other civilizations and its relevance to development has been felt across the world (Rashidi, 2009). Paradoxically, underdeveloped societies have remarkably abundant resources but unable to ensure adequate development. For instance, Zambia and Congo export a large quantity of copper to Europe, north America and Japan, while Nigeria and Libya export several millions of barrels of crude oil. Yet, these exporting African societies remain underdeveloped. African societies

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