

Chapter 27

Efficacy of Culture Houses and Centres in the Acquisition, Preservation, and Dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter documents the role played by culture centres and houses in the acquisition, preservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge (IK) in a digital era in Zimbabwe. It states the ethical issues involved when acquiring, preserving and disseminating IK in the digital era. A history of culture houses and centres was studied and a literature review of the role of culture centres was done. In Zimbabwe, it was noted that culture houses and centres do not have a web presence. However, there are challenges that are met by information specialists working in these culture houses and centres in the process of managing IK. These challenges are part of the ethical issues that should be considered in the production, access and use of IK. Recommendations have been put forward that would help culture houses and centres in their bid to manage IK in the digital era.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge (IK) has been regarded as a way of knowing and doing things over a period of time by a certain community and the knowledge is passed orally from one generation to the other. Mutula (2002) supports the idea that indigenous knowledge is passed by oral methods and is embedded

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in community practices. Wahab (2010) adds that this knowledge includes the experiences and skills of people in a certain community which are used to maintain and improve their livelihood. The term is used interchangeably with traditional knowledge and local knowledge as put forward by Sam (2005) who states that indigenous knowledge is traditional or local knowledge which is unique to a given culture, location or society. Research have shown that it is important to document indigenous knowledge to ensure that it is not lost (Chisenga, 2002; Ebijuwa & Mabawonku, 2015; Mabawonku, 2002; Magara, 2002; Makara, 2002; Ngulube, 2002; Nnadozie, 2013; Poorna, Mymoon, & Hariharan, 2014). The objective of this chapter is to show how culture houses and centres can acquire, preserve and disseminate indigenous knowledge to ensure that it can be fully used to the advantage of all the people. The chapter points out how indigenous knowledge can be properly documented in culture centres and culture houses to efficiently locate and utilise it. The chapter begins by looking at IK, its characteristics and importance. It then moves on to describe acquisition, preservation and dissemination of IK in a digital era. The history of culture houses in Zimbabwe and their role then follow. Challenges encountered by the information professionals working in culture houses and possible solutions are given. Authors conclude by providing recommendations for future research.

BACKGROUND

Acquisition, preservation and dissemination are part of indigenous knowledge management which have been greatly affected by the advent of information communication technologies (ICTs). Indigenous knowledge (IK) is also regarded as one of the areas which are under threat of being extinct. Culture houses or centres were identified as one of the areas where IK can be safeguarded since most of the knowledge is not documented and is unique to a given culture, community or society. According to the Cultural Policy of Zimbabwe, (Zimbabwe, 2007), culture centres were supposed to be established in the provinces, districts and villages where major cultural events can be promoted. There was also need to strengthen existing culture centres. The Constitution of Zimbabwe, (Zimbabwe, 2013) says that the state must take measures to preserve, protect and promote IK in medicine and other properties of animal and plant life possessed by local communities. It is against this background that this chapter is addressing the role that is played by culture centres in the acquisition, preservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge in the digital era in Zimbabwe.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) documents what indigenous people are expected to do in relation to the management of indigenous knowledge (United Nations, 2008). It embraces IK by advocating for indigenous people's rights to access, preserve and disseminate IK (United Nations, 2008:11). It also recognises the importance of respecting IK, culture and traditional practices in contributing to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment (United Nations, 2008:2). Ryser (2012) states that after the adoption of the UNDRIP, international organisations, nongovernmental organisations, governments, and indigenous peoples seek to record and document IK. This is one of the activities done by culture centres to contribute to sustainable solutions to the various problems that might be experienced in communities. Ryser (1997) also adds that other people have great knowledge that permits them to understand the environment of other peoples with regard to IK. Therefore, there is need to acquire, preserve and disseminate such knowledge to make it accessible to researchers.

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