


Chapter 12

Strategies to Manage and Preserve Indigenous Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

The knowledge society globally has made us realize that knowledge is an important resource in gaining not only a competitive advantage but also for social and economic development. Each society and country possesses some inherent information and knowledge, which is unique to its growth and development trajectory. This is ‘indigenous knowledge’ or ‘local knowledge’. However, the method and approaches to preserve this ‘indigenous knowledge’ or ‘local knowledge’ is less known and neither understood by many, especially in the emerging economies. Hence, adopting a systematic literature review method and in-depth literature review, the aim of this chapter is to provide strategies to preserve and manage indigenous knowledge systems. Further, the chapter also provides a holistic approach to preserve and manage indigenous knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is the key to sustainable social and economic development. Building on local knowledge, the basic component of any country knowledge system, is the first step to mobilize such a capital. Exchange within a community where providers and recipients speak the same language and share its underlying cultural concepts is easily able than transferring tacit knowledge across cultures. Indigenous knowledge and appropriate “techno-blending” is essential. In this way, people can use their own locally generated knowledge to change or improve their livelihood and provide opportunities for designing development projects.

Indigenous knowledge management needs serious consideration as it could provide practical tools for poverty alleviation, sustainable development, and empowerment in general. The exchange of indigenous knowledge is an ideal outcome of a successful transfer and dissemination. To provide the foundation for indigenous innovations and experimentations managing indigenous knowledge is an initial step. In

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order to gain maximum benefit developing countries have to improve both scientific as well as traditional knowledge at the local level.

Hence adopting a systematic literature review method and in-depth literature review, the aim of this chapter is to provide strategies to preserve and manage indigenous knowledge systems. Further, the chapter also provides a holistic framework to preserve and manage indigenous knowledge. The chapter also explores in more detail some of the reasons for preserving indigenous knowledge, important issues to consider in managing indigenous knowledge, potential tools and solutions to address these challenges of indigenous knowledge management from an Indo-African perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indigenous knowledge (IK) refers to a complete body of knowledge, expertise and practices maintained and developed by peoples through generations specific to certain areas. As they have extended histories of interaction with the natural environment, indigenous knowledge is somehow unlike the international knowledge system, which is generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. IK is the information base for a society, which facilitates communication and decision-making; it is dynamic and is continuously influenced by internal creativity and experimentation as well as by contact with external systems. On the other hand, IK is unique to a given culture or society, the basis for local level decision making in agriculture, healthcare, food preparation, education, natural resource management and a host of other activities for example in African communities. Thus, IK can be broadly defined as the knowledge of indigenous (local) community accumulated over generations of living in exacting environment. This definition encompasses all forms of knowledge – technologies, expertise skills, practices and beliefs – that enable the community to achieve stable livelihoods and survival in their environment.

Indigenous knowledge is built up by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature but mostly not available in codified form. According to Gorjestani, (2004), “IK is usually tacit knowledge, stored in people’s individual or collective memories, and often guarded jealously, hence the saying that *each times an elder dies; it is as if a library had burned down*”. Indigenous knowledge is also the accumulation of practical experiences and encompasses sum of facts that are known or learnt from experience or acquired through observation.

Indigenous knowledge is a practical concept, which can be used to facilitate communication among people coming from different backgrounds such as researchers, development practitioners and beneficiaries. IK sharing among local communities is usually through and transferred from one generation to the next, through oral traditions and storytelling. IK contains several important characteristics, which distinguish it from other types of knowledge. These include originating within the community, maintaining a non-formal means of dissemination, collectively owned, developed over several generations and subject to adaptation, as well as imbedded in a community way of life as a means for survival. Generally, indigenous knowledge has two kinds of carriers. The first kind is millions of laypersons, ordinary householders, farmers, shepherds, artisans, artists, and priests. It includes both men and women. The second kind is scholars and seers. Their numbers runs into several hundred thousand. The exchange of IK is taking place through personal communication and demonstration i.e. from master to apprentice, from parents to children, from neighbor to neighbor, from priest to parish. Herbal medicine is a good example of IK, which has noticeable impact on the lives of people around the globe.

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