



## Indigenous Knowledge and Public Library System for National Development in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*This study focused on indigenous knowledge and the public library system for national development in Nigeria. It began with introducing the concept of indigenous knowledge system and articulates the definitions for indigenous knowledge. It went further to paper explore the relevance of indigenous knowledge, especially in agriculture and medicine. Recognizing the unique value embedded in local traditions and practices, the study investigated how public libraries can serve as dynamic platforms for preserving, disseminating, and utilising indigenous knowledge. The paper concluded that to enhance the propagation of IK, and aid it in taking its place in nation-building, the public library must hold itself responsible for identifying, collating, and sorting Indigenous Knowledge.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous knowledge, National development, Public library, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Knowledge is one of the most intangible assets considered to be relevant to the development of every organization, including the libraries. According to Senanayake (2006), a collection of knowledge that has been built up by a group of people over a period of time, through human interaction with nature can be considered as indigenous knowledge. Public libraries, as libraries for all, have the moral responsibility to preserve the traditions of the people they serve. They help to preserve and conserve this knowledge to prevent its loss and provide an accurate history, as this knowledge is unique to a culture or society (Osuchukwu&Udeze, 2021). Similarly, the public library serve multiple functions such as collecting all materials relating to its community or written in the communities dialect, and acts as a gateway to the community in this information technology age (Chibuzor&Ngozi, 2009).

Public libraries are vital to the development of every community, but in a developing nation like Nigeria, there are major challenges faced, in some locality these structures don't exist at all has some people are not aware of its presence and as such cannot utilise their benefits. Another challenge is that public libraries do not prioritize Indigenous knowledge (IK) in their community as African libraries and information centres are faced with a plethora of challenges in the documentation and communication of indigenous knowledge (Sithole,2007) , rather it relies on word of mouth and memory majorly disseminated in communities and households (Sillitoe and Marzano, 2009).

In Nigeria, Indigenous knowledge has not developed as it should, especially in playing its part in the development of the nation. Indigenous knowledge could contribute to the creation of development strategies that the aided society can accept culturally (Makinde and Shorunke, 2016; Okorafor, 2010). However, public libraries ought to be equipped to educate the community with knowledge about the community, by the community, and for them.

## **Concept of Indigenous Knowledge**

Every aspect of human endeavour is driven by knowledge, which is ubiquitous. People who interact with their surroundings discover varying information, and since different people groups live in different places, they learn how to adapt to and prosper in those environments, which eventually becomes their history.

Indigenous knowledge also known as IK, traditional knowledge, local knowledge and rural people's knowledge refers to the common ability of a particular group of people in a society mostly in rural areas who have a common history that forms basis of their local level decision making of their everyday affair including occupation, health care, Agriculture, food preparation and social life. (Aboyade&Adeyemo, 2019). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO (2017) also defined IK as knowledge that “refers to the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For rural and indigenous peoples, local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life”. Gaudry (2015) averred that Indigenous knowledge is therefore particular to a specific community as it tells their story, revealing their ideals. Indigenous knowledge (IK) is the comprehension, abilities, and ideologies that have been cultivated by a community with extensive histories and encounters with their natural environments (Hill et al, 2020). It points to the wholesome information about a people, taking root in their history. Adebayo and Adeyemo (2018) recognized IK as knowledge that describes the manner of life, expertise, culture, wisdom, and ideals that a community embraces. Nakata and Langton (2005) notes that indigenous knowledge is owned collectively by the community and exists as folklores, stories, proverbs, songs, cultural values, norms, beliefs, rituals, local languages, health care and agricultural practices such as animal husbandry, animal breeds, development of plant species, land cultivation practices and crop propagation methods. This point to the fact that IK is developed outside the academic setting and is communicated orally. Invariably, IK is said to be tacit knowledge in which knowledge can be better expressed in actions more than words.

## **Relevance of Indigenous Knowledge in National development**

Indigenous knowledge provides the basis for problem-solving and represents vital component of global knowledge for developmental issues (Adebayo & Adeyemo, 2018).

According to Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019), indigenous knowledge covers all fields of human endeavour including, but not limited to, agriculture, environment, pharmacology, health, trade and economics, and political systems. Most of the local communities in African countries depend on indigenous agricultural practices where majority of the food produced comes from traditional farming (Aboyade & Adeyemo, 2019). With indigenous knowledge, indigenous people determine when rain will come, consequently, when to plant, various farming systems to employ that will enhance soil fertility, increase yield, harvest, weed control, plant propagation, pest management and plant protection techniques, as well as storage, preservation, processing and marketing methods (Adigun, 2014). Examples are using burnt cow dungs and neem (dogonyaro) seeds for preserving legumes and the use of manure as fertilizer with long residual content (Chinaki et al., 2015). Similarly, Anyira, Onoriode, and Nwabueze (2010) indicate that the IK system assists local people of the Niger Delta region in Nigeria preserve their fishes, foods, and work of arts. There is a growing appreciation of the value of IK. It has become valuable not only to those who depend on it in their daily lives, but to modern industry and agriculture as well. Adedipe et al (2004) added that small scale resource farmers have good reasons for sticking with their local knowledge and farming practices, because modern technologies can only be successful and sustainable if IK is taken into consideration

In the aspect of traditional medicine, research has shown that local indigenes in various communities in Nigeria make use of extracts from plants to treat and cure various ailments and diseases. For example, Adigun (2014) posited that through indigenous knowledge, local people engage in traditional medical practices such as the use of various herbs to cure different ailments, heat therapy, quarantine, incisions, bone setting and surgery. It is estimated that 85% of Nigerians access traditional medicine for healthcare, social and psychological benefits. Extracts from plants and animals from diverse parts of Nigeria have been found to be useful for treating diseases such as malaria, diabetics, epilepsy, dementia, sickle cell disorders and inflammation (Adeleja 2006). According to WHO (2019), 40% of modern medicine was created from plants that were originally used locally and are drawn from indigenous knowledge, and as such indigenous knowledge has come to be recognized as a valuable resource in the growth of global health.

Given the abundant and clear evidence supporting the relevance of indigenous knowledge, it is only fitting that every person, especially those to whom it belongs, should be exposed to it. Because

every community should be a representative of its knowledge before contrasting and combining with knowledge from any other source, a nation must be well aware of and informed about itself before it can flourish. This includes knowledge about its culture, innovation, ideals, and values.

### **The roles of public library system in fast tracking the use of indigenous knowledge for national development in Nigeria**

Research have shown that Nigeria with its diverse ethnic cultural groups and language have a rich body of indigenous knowledge developed over many centuries. Nonetheless, the recognition that indigenous knowledge has a role to play in national development should stimulate interest in the preservation and management by formal information management institutions like public libraries in Nigeria. Since indigenous knowledge is essential to nation's development, it must be gathered, organized and disseminated in the same systematic way as modern knowledge (Agrawal, 2004). It is then of utmost importance that, such indigenous knowledge should be documented, organized and kept for the benefit of mankind and for nation development (Aboyade&Adeyemo, 2019). Given the nature, location and ownership structure of indigenous knowledge, there is a lot that libraries as development institutions can do, especially in understanding, locating, collecting, storing, preserving and disseminating these indigenous resources ( Adigun,2014)

The role of the library in the development of IK is majorly in the gathering, recording, preservation, and distribution (Adebayo&Adeyemo, 2018). Since the public library is the one closest to the community and, therefore, is exposed to the greatest amount of Indigenous knowledge, it is the library that bears the brunt of this role. As a result, the importance of Indigenous knowledge must be acknowledged.

It is imperative that public libraries and their librarians take proactive measures to encourage increased documentation of Indigenous knowledge, as well as further research and investigation into its structure and lost forms. Das Gupta and Saha (2009) suggest ways in which valuable information related to IK can be captured and documented. He further states that for the effective preservation of IK in public libraries, there is a need to gain local people's trust in making them share their knowledge.

Many libraries recognize IK as an important source of developmental information. Nakata and Langton (2005) observe that the library and information profession has a lot to learn if they are to meet the information needs of indigenous people and appropriately manage IK. Thus, It is the job of Public librarians to develop new tools and techniques in order to meet the needs of information knowledge users (Anwar, 2010). That means the public librarians must have the requisite skills in ensuring the needs of the indigenous users are meant.

As a result of these, recorded video tapes, pamphlets and magazines in their local language can be made available for them. Also, workshops can be organized from time to time for those communities.

Jain and Jubril (2016) enumerate various ways in which public libraries can promote practical IK activities. These include effective knowledge resources management, resource sharing, resource networking, adoption of technology tools, and user services education

Also, Okore, Ekere, and Ekere (2009) list various ways in which public libraries can promote effective preservation of the IK system for national development to include:

- (i) Through documentation of IK stories which can be done through recording either audio tapes, and video.
- (ii) Through the publication of IK into books or other reading documents.
- (iii) Using ICT formats to preserve IK.
- (iv) By creating public awareness and mass education where everybody will be taught about IK of their communities.
- (v) Public libraries can also organize talk shows that involve kings, chiefs and elders in the communities. These talks can be on IK and health, farming, ecosystem, agriculture, conflict resolutions, among others.

Judging by how relevant and valuable is IK, nations are urged to incorporate IK into the planning and preservation of their cultural heritage as well as into finding solutions to contemporary problems (IFLA, 2002). Seeing this important information, libraries generally should therefore seek to have it massively emphasised in the minds of individuals, and for public libraries, this role is targeted at the indigenous community.

## **Conclusion**

To enhance the propagation of IK and to aid it in taking its place in nation-building, the public library must hold itself responsible for the identification, collation, and sorting of Indigenous Knowledge. Documentaries are a vital way of informing a nation about its culture, tradition, and ideals, great strides have already been made in these sectors through several detailed and expository writings and motion pictures. The public library can play a vital part in this progress though and ensuring there are havens for accurate and factual bibliotheca for this knowledge

The immense role indigenous knowledge plays in bringing global interest into the nation fosters growth in tourism, e-commerce, and investment as people tend to embrace what they understand better. More research is required to harness the wealth of IK in several areas such as medicine, agriculture, language, architecture, and engineering (Mawere, 2014).

IK should be carefully looked into by the government where issues on documentation, preservation and accessibility need to be properly addressed. Also librarians should develop library acquisition policies that would promote indigenous knowledge so as to acquire and preserve indigenous local African knowledge for the use of all information users which can be kept in the Africana section of the library in book, journal, pictorial and digital form (Aboyade&Adebayo, 2019)

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