Promoting African indigenous knowledge in the knowledge economy: exploring the role of academia and librarians

Prof Kgomotso Moahi
Dean, Faculty of Humanities, University of Botswana, Botswana

Abstract

Every community has its own knowledge system which enables it to survive, relate and make sense of its context and environment. As such, indigenous knowledge (IK) is not necessarily the preserve of the African continent and its people. However, the fact is that Africa has a lot to offer in terms of its IK and studies have shown that IK is used and applied by a majority of communities in the African setting in the areas of health, agriculture, arts, education, etc. The issue though is that much of IK is under threat of disappearing and is also not in any way considered as an integral part of the knowledge economy as we know it. Generally, Africa is said to only contribute roughly 1% of the knowledge within the knowledge economy. Indeed, Africa is known to be a knowledge consumer, rather than a knowledge generator. Whatever knowledge that comes out of African IK is more often than not knowledge that was taken out and appropriated elsewhere without acknowledgement or gain for the community from which it was taken or originated from. This paper will explore why Africa's IK is not playing a more active and visible role in the knowledge economy (other than as exotic arts and crafts). The reasons are many, but the fact of the matter is that the very history of the African continent has a lot to do with it, from the days of being colonized, to the ways that academics and librarians perceive their role. The paper will also explore the roles that both academia and librarians must play if IK is to feature prominently in the knowledge economy.