

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

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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.

Prof Kgomotso Moahi is currently servicing the University of Botswana as the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, a post she assumed in July 2008. Prior to that she was head of the Department of Library and Information Studies, a position she held for 6 years. As Head of the Department of Library and Information Studies, Moahi has researched and written on the use of ICTs in information management and librarianship; promotion and protection of indigenous knowledge; as well as health informatics.

She has served in many university committees and as Chair of the Ad Hoc Task Force on Student Academic Dishonesty at the University of Botswana – a task force set up by the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic to explore the extent of academic dishonesty amongst students and make recommendations on ways to address it. She has also represented the University in her professional service by participating in a number of initiatives aimed at encouraging the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) for development such as the development of an ICT policy for Botswana (MAITLAMO) in 2004; She was co-chair of the health commission in the 2nd World Information Technology Forum (WITFOR) conference that took place in Gaborone in 2005. She participated in a Telemedicine feasibility study that was spearheaded by the Botswana Technology Centre (BOTECH) in 2005/6. Together with information professionals at UB, she helped found the Children's Information Trust in 2004 which aims to encourage the development of libraries in primary schools in a bid to facilitate development of information literacy skills of primary school children in Botswana.

