Promoting African Indigenous Knowledge in the knowledge economy: exploring the role of higher education and libraries

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Organization of the paper

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Introduction

- African IK has a lot to offer, covering all aspects of life
- IK endures, but for how much longer
- Nepad has recognized the importance of IK
- There are reasons why IK has not made the impact it should
- Where it makes an impact, it most likely has been misappropriated
- There is a role for both academia and libraries
IK and its marginalization

• Three broad aspects (Dei, 2000):
  – Traditional knowledge (intergenerational)
  – Empirical knowledge - based on observation of the environment
  – Revealed knowledge – provided through dreams, visions and intuition

• It provides problem solving for communities, contributes significantly to global development knowledge, but is underutilised in the development process (Tella, 2007)
IK and its marginalization

• Tacit nature
• Social capital of the poor
• Denigration by colonials and western education
• Leaders educated to look down on IK
• Development has relied exclusively on one knowledge system
• Development is equated with internalization of western culture
• Dichotomising IK and western knowledge
• IK has contributed to the development of modern scientific knowledge
IK and knowledge economy

• New order where knowledge is recognized as capital to be leveraged for development and prosperity
• IK invisible in the knowledge economy
• Contribution has not been recognized
• Much of it has been misappropriated by scientists
• The Innovation gap
• Need to document, research and promote IK
Higher education and IK – the scenario

• African universities should be the hub of activity on all things African and indigenous – but not the case
• They should lead in the African renaissance
• The current marketisation of programs do not augur well for the humanities and social sciences
• Issues around having Centres of African Studies in African universities
What role higher education?

- Conducting research and publishing it
- Collaboration with private companies to avoid “the innovation chasm”
- Collaborate with govt and other agencies to conduct audits of IK
- Include IK in the curriculum
- “facilitate the recognition and validation of the legitimacy of IK as a pedagogic, instructional communicative tool in the process of delivering education”
- Consider how IK and western knowledge can be integrated for development
What role for higher education?

- Develop leaders that appreciate and accept the crucial role of IK in development
- Introduce a common compulsory 1st year course that seeks to affirm African views and thought systems
- The role of African Studies centres
- Centres of study – e.g. Centre for Scientific Research, Indigenous Knowledge and Innovation (CESRIKI)
What role for Libraries?

• Libraries meant to serve all
• Mandated to collect, preserve and disseminate IK by IFLA
• Therefore should do that by identifying, documenting and promoting IK
• However, training and orientation precludes this proactivity
• Librarians must leave their cocoons and venture out
• Libraries must partner with communities
• Understand the needs of the community in order to serve them accordingly
What role for libraries?

- Understand what IK is and its significance
- Promote IK, by making communities aware of its importance
- Engage elders to tell stories to children which can be documented; libraries as community information centres
- Utilise technology – both at lower scale and at upper scale
- Librarians need to learn new skills
- Appreciate IPR
Conclusion

• African IK does not contribute as much as it should in the knowledge economy
• There is need for academia and libraries to get actively involved in developing IK use and appreciation
• THANK YOU