

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