

Paper presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) International Conference on Information, Records and Archives in a Knowledge Society, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 6-8 August, 2013.

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## **LOCAL KNOWLEDGE PRESERVATION AND DISSEMINATION IN ZAMBIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Indigenous knowledge, has in the recent years, received a lot of recognition and appreciation. It has been observed that a people's identity hinges largely on their worldviews including mores, traditions and values. Indigenous knowledge is a critical factor for sustainable development as it can be used to solve problems and better people's lives. The empowerment of local communities is a prerequisite for the integration of indigenous knowledge in the development process. Just like any other knowledge, indigenous knowledge needs to be well preserved, constantly used, and adapted to the evolving local contexts. Since it plays a major role in promoting development in any nation, it is therefore cardinal that this knowledge is well preserved and disseminated for the betterment and development of a nation. The digital environment has created a lot of opportunities as well as challenges in the way local knowledge is produced, preserved and disseminated. This paper discusses the importance of indigenous knowledge as well as how the Information and Communication Technologies have impacted on the way that this knowledge preserved and disseminated.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous Knowledge, traditions, preservation, digital environment, development.

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Indigenous Knowledge is an important factor for sustainable development. The empowerment of local people and communities is a necessity in integrating Indigenous Knowledge in the development process. Tandong and Nelson (2010) argue that the integration of appropriate Indigenous Knowledge Systems into developmental programmes has proved to contribute to efficiency, effectiveness and

sustainable development impact. Indigenous Knowledge is defined as a system of complex arrays of knowledge, know-how, practices and representations that guide human societies in their innumerable interactions with the natural environment (Nakashima and Roue).

Local people rely so much on IK to make their decisions on various aspects of their lives. This may be related to the growing of food, preservation and preparation of food, medicines, their roles in society as males and females, etc. Some people in Zambia are not able to access formal education and as such may not be privy to conventional or scientific knowledge on how to do several things or make decisions. IK is very cardinal in such instances because it can be disseminated to people even from their own homes without them necessarily having to sit in a formal classroom.

The development of Information and Communication Technologies have brought about so many opportunities on how IK can be preserved and disseminated to people. It is therefore important that planners and policy makers take advantage of such opportunities. Before the advent of ICT's it was difficult to document and preserve IK but with their presence and constant development, they have provided a means of storing such Knowledge, such as recording of proverbs, traditional songs, etc that have teachings. This widens the dissemination part of IK because it is no longer strictly passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth but these recorded teachings are preserved using various types of ICT's and can be utilized by people whenever needed.

Akinwale (2012) argues that communities and organizations around the world are realizing the value and significance of IK and the importance of preserving it for future generations. In Africa, Zambia inclusive, the capture and preservation of IK is being used to revitalize endangered cultures, improve the economic independence and sustainability of indigenous communities and to increase community-based involvement in planning and development.

In Zambia, museums are one of the most relied upon institutions when it comes to storage and preservation of IK. The National Museums Board in Zambia has taken keen interest in ensuring that national museums present in the country stand up to their expectations. Despite the various challenges that these museums face currently, they still stand out as an important source of IK. Libraries and archives also play an important role in preserving and disseminating IK.

Radio and television broadcasting are among the ICT's in Zambia that is being used to disseminate IK to people. This has numerous advantages over some of the other ways of educating and informing people because it is able to reach masses even from their own homes or anywhere else that they may be. With the increase in people owning computers, mobile phones, etc, radio and television services cannot only be accessed through a radio or television set but also through these other ICT's. It is therefore important that such facilities, which people normally use for communication purposes are fully utilized to include disseminating IK which will ultimately help local people, especially rural people to make decisions and in turn improve their lives.

## **2.0 PRESERVING AND DOCUMENTING IK IN ZAMBIA**

This requires capacity in terms of skills, expertise and financial resources (Kashweka and Akakandelwa, 2008). It is important to preserve IK because it provides problem-solving strategies for local communities, especially in rural areas. Mkapa (2004) observes that IK can be used to solve problems that affect local people, can help to grow more and healthier food can help to maintain healthy lives, to prevent conflict and to manage the local affairs of its people.

In Zambia, museums are one of the most important institutions that preserve IK in many different forms. These museums are places where historical, scientific and artistic knowledge is preserved as well as disseminated. The country has four national museums run by the National Museums Board. These include Lusaka Museum in Lusaka Province, Livingstone Museum in Southern Province, Moto Mota Museum in Northern Province and Ndola Museum in Copperbelt Province. Zambia also has two community museums; Choma Museum in Southern Province and Nayuma Museum in Western Province.

Indigenous knowledge, when well documented and preserved is able to provide information and know-how on how food for example can be traditionally preserved for example by drying and also how it can be prepared. Food is a basic need of life and as such whether people are in urban or rural areas, this is a need. Some people in rural areas lack certain preservation facilities such as fridges or deep freezers. They therefore need adequate knowledge on how food can still be preserved even in the absence of such facilities.

Another cardinal area of preserving IK is medicine. Several people in rural areas survive on traditional medicines when need arises. In some instances hospitals are very far away and local people cannot always conventional medicines when needed. IK preservation is cardinal because it will ensure that knowledge on traditional medicines as well as the dosages is well documented and disseminated. This will protect lives and benefit the local people.

Proverbs and folklores are also important forms of imparting teachings and values on the learners or people. These have, for a long time, been an important source of traditional teachings. Although previously these were simply narrated by elders and other knowledgeable people in the community, they can now, with the use of ICT's be recorded, say on compact disks or tapes, etc and played to children or other people later. This is important because despite knowledgeable people passing on, the knowledge remains and could be built on and developed by others.

### **3.0 DISSEMINATION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN ZAMBIA**

#### **3.1 The use of Information and Communication Technologies**

The emergence of new technologies for rapid dissemination of knowledge known as digital revolution is very influential even in the dissemination of IK (Akinwale, Akeem Ayofe, 2012). Adam (2007) agrees with this when he says that the role of Information and Communication Technologies in the dissemination of IK is a profound, detailed and shared beliefs and rules with regards to the physical resource, social norms, health, ecosystem, culture and the livelihood of people who interact with the environment both in rural and urban settings. IK represents an important component of global knowledge.

ICT's can be used to capture, store and disseminate IK so that this knowledge is preserved for the future generations and even improved upon. This is because IK is dynamic and improves with experience. There are various ICT's that can be used to preserve and disseminate IK but Adam (2007) suggests that more focus should be on tools that promote oral interaction such as audio-visual technologies, etc. ICT's need to support the move beyond documentation and also to improve adaptation, adoption and experimentation. ICT's should therefore be instrumental in enhancing the systematic integration of modern and traditional knowledge.

##### **3.1.1 Museums**

These institutions in Zambia currently play an important role in informing and educating people of the IK that various traditions and cultures have. Museums are open to the public though at a small fee and for locals or citizens of Zambia, the charge is very negligible. In some cases, especially when used for academic purposes, the service is entirely free. People who visit museums are able to learn from the various artefacts that the museums include in their collections. Museums have this important role of ensuring that traditions through the collections that they have, are well preserved and stored.

Museums, just like archives and libraries play an invaluable role in preserving the rich cultural heritage of people. Such institutions which record and preserve the music, arts and other traditional teachings of indigenous peoples must be given a lot of attention.

##### **3.1.2 Broadcasting**

The choice and usage of local languages in disseminating indigenous knowledge plays a very important role in the developmental process. This is because it is not only a means of communication but it also serves as a means of cultural expression, education, embodiment of technical and cultural knowledge and a repository of people's history (Atintono and Nsoh, 2011). In Zambia, the use of the seven local

languages in both radio and television broadcasting has therefore played a critical role in disseminating IK to people, especially in the rural areas.

The following table shows the radio stations in Zambia and the categories in which they fall.

*Table 1: Registered Radio Stations in Zambia*

	Type of radio station	Total number	%
1	Commercial	25	42.4
2	Religious	15	25.4
3	Community	14	23.7
4	Public broadcaster	3	5.1
5	Educational	2	3.4
	Total	59	100

Table 1 above shows that Zambia had a total of 59 radio stations as at June, 2013. Of these, about 42% are run commercially, 25% are religious in nature and 24% are community radio stations. In terms of statistics, Central Statistics Office (2012) states that about 47% of the households in Zambia own a radio set. This means that almost half of the households in the country are able to access radio services. This therefore becomes a very important tool in disseminating IK. This number actually increases as people are now able to access radio services even using their cellular phones and/or even computers, etc.

IK is knowledge that is unique to a given culture or tradition. The fact that about 24% of the radio stations are community based makes it easier to disseminate IK to people living in a particular community as these people will have the same or similar traditions and beliefs. Issues of using local languages by radio stations, especially community ones, are an added advantage because people in one rural community are likely to be familiar to one language.

Radio broadcasting has further advantages in disseminating IK because other than reaching so many people at the same time, it also reaches people who may not have the opportunity to go through formal schooling. It further benefits individuals who cannot read and write. As long as they are able to understand the language in use, this is a very convenient way of reaching out to them.

In Zambia, the national broadcaster, the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) plays a very critical role in disseminating IK to people across all provinces. The radio station has dedicated one channel, Radio 1, to local programming where the seven major language clusters are used to broadcast various programmes. These include: Nyanja, Bemba, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Tonga and Kaonde. The programmes that are broadcast inform and educate people on various issues including health, sports, entertainment, etc. The teachings are mainly in form of

drama, stories, poems. Community radio stations also have similar means of disseminating knowledge that benefit the listeners, rural people especially.

Television broadcasting is also another means of disseminating IK. With the visual component, it is one of the effective ways of educating people. Just as with radio broadcasting, this reaches people in masses and the use of local languages and even interpretations makes it easier for the rural people to benefit. It also does not have limitations of benefiting only those who have gone to formal schools. It reaches people wherever they are as long as the service is available. In Zambia, about 30% of the households own a television set and of these, 11% access digital satellite television. This is much less than the people who own radio sets. In terms of number, Zambia has a total of nine television stations.

The Zambia National Broadcasting has the widest coverage as it reaches all the ten provinces. ZNBC television has also dedicated almost an hour every week day to broadcasting programmes that are indigenous in nature in the seven main local languages. The programming of the local programmes that are indigenous in nature includes different aspects of life including current affairs, health, food, entertainment, etc. This is one way that the national broadcaster has contributed in the dissemination of indigenous knowledge.

### **3.2 Challenges of preserving and disseminating IK**

It is believed that sharing knowledge is power. This sometimes is not done when people feel that by giving out the knowledge they possess, they will lose out and others may gain. With regards IK, this is particularly true especially when it comes to knowledge on traditional medicines. Some people earn a living by helping people with traditional medicines for various ailments at a fee. When it comes to sharing this knowledge, some will be reluctant as this would mean loss of business. This also brings in problems of intellectual property rights as some custodians of IK feel they would lose out if their knowledge is recorded and used elsewhere.

With regards broadcasting, this comes at a huge cost. It is no wonder that in Zambia, the largest number of radio stations are commercial in nature (42%) and all the radio stations but one, are commercial in nature. It is expensive on the part of the radio or television station to operate and manage the station. However, on the part of the listeners or viewers, it is relatively affordable.

Most radio and television stations in Zambia, other than the national broadcaster, the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation have a limited coverage area and as such are not able to reach the majority of people.

The use of ICT's have their own disadvantages because in as much as teachings can be recorded, issues of editing and sometimes translations may change the original idea and manner of presentation.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

It is evident that a good number of people depend on IK to make decisions and improve their lives. In Zambia about 65% of the population are in the rural areas where IK is more cardinal. The sources of this information must therefore be widened. Libraries are critical contributors to knowledge generation which can serve a variety of seekers. It is important that different kinds of libraries increase their IK collections to ensure that people can access it whenever needed.

ICT's today have created many opportunities with regards the preservation and dissemination of IK. It is now possible to have this knowledge recorded and used at any time when needed. It is also possible to disseminate this knowledge to many people at the same time such as through broadcasting. IK is able to reach people in both formal and non formal educational systems.

It is important that in Zambia, museums are increased in number so that all provinces may have their own institutions that would reflect the way life of its people. Local people will find visiting museums useful if the collections would reflect their lives.

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