

Cross-Cultural Social Research with Indigenous Knowledge (IK): Some Dilemmas and Lessons

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Abstract:

This paper looks at many contemporary issues in cross-cultural social research with indigenous knowledge (IK). The paper draws some practical examples and experiences based on two PhD research works done in two countries in the South – Zambia (Banda, 2008) and Bangladesh (Islam, 2009). The paper argues that this is the Eurocentric assumption which holds that no body of knowledge can be owned by a tribe or group of people and that alternative knowledge to universal knowledge is ignorance. Finally, this paper highlights the need for more research in IK by researcher from both the North and the South, but taking into account the peculiarities and complexities conducting research in IK.

Keywords: *Qualitative Research, Cross-Cultural Social Research, Indigenous Knowledge, Ethics in Social Research, Bangladesh, Zambia.*

Introduction

This paper looks at many contemporary issues in cross-cultural social research with indigenous knowledge (IK). The paper draws some practical examples and experiences based on two PhD research works done in two countries in the South – Zambia (Banda, 2008) and Bangladesh (Islam, 2009). Banda (2008) conducted his research on two communities of practice - those perceived to be custodians of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS), (paramount and subordinate chiefs and other traditional leaders, traditional birth attendants (*Anamwino*), counsellors (*Alangizi*), and parents) and policy-makers and implementers (Educationists, University lectures, NGOs involved with the provision of education in the area, teachers and pupils). This research made an attempt to analyse how the two communities of practice depart or meet and the attitudes each group has towards the other on the provision and quality of education. On the other hand, Islam (2009) conducted his research on two communities (one urban, the other rural) from two

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NGOs in Bangladesh: *Proshika* and Practical Action Bangladesh (PAB) and data were obtained from two indigenous occupations: blacksmiths and goldsmiths.

Challenges and dilemmas of cross-culture research are analysed in this paper. Underpinning the two researches are lessons, warnings, guidelines and pieces of advice to researchers whose cultural background is different from those under study. This contribution highlights the characteristics perceived to be sources of these dilemmas namely that IK is widely considered not universal, undocumented, context-based and consequently non-existent. It argues that this is the Eurocentric assumption which holds that no body of knowledge can be owned by a tribe or group of people and that alternative knowledge to universal knowledge is ignorance. Finally, this paper highlights the need for more research in IK by researchers from both the North and the South, but taking into account the peculiarities and complexities conducting research in IK. The paper also makes a passionate appeal to those supervising students studying in the North but doing their field work in their home countries in the South to make an allowance of variations to conventional and 'universal' research techniques and ethical issues.

Cross-cultural issues on the global research

It is important to observe that cultural diversity is a reality (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2004), and we would say that this phenomenon makes cross-cultural or intercultural research a challenge. It could also be argued that it is an important source of new learning, inspiration and possibly creativity for groups, individuals, organisations and societies in this global world (Sillitoe, Dixon & Barr, 2005). Globalization is interpreted in many ways by various scholars and researchers. Mazrui (2001) interprets globalization in three divergent ways:

1. an economic interdependency across vast distances
2. information availability and movement across vast distances
3. reduction of the world into a global village

Mazrui (2001) further identifies two forms of globalization namely economic and cultural. Moahi (2007) views globalization as the opening up and interconnectedness of the world. He argues that this opening up is all about empire building, search for raw materials, and new markets (Boulding, 1988; Mazrui, 2001), and that the process of this globalization could have its roots in colonialism. Colonialism had same driving forces as those started above. The fears expressed in some quarters (Grenier, 1998; Mazrui, 2001; Odora, 2002; Hoahi, 2007) are that just as colonialism displaced many people from their cultural lands, plundered cultural objects and many artefacts and adversely diluted the rich cultures of the colonized people, globalization may, in subtle ways, do the same. It may undermine, among many, the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) of those perceived to be in the peripheral of the so-called 'universal knowledge'. In the area of research we would say there are relations and contradictions between research in the North and South based on various perspectives such as methodological, epistemological and ethical perspectives.

This paper draws examples from two indigenous knowledge system (IKS) -related research works conducted in Zambia (Banda, 2008) and Bangladesh (Islam, 2009). We would say the two researchers used western paradigms from the North (The University of Nottingham, England) to conduct their research in the South (Zambia and Bangladesh). This paper tries to identify and acknowledge similarities and differences that cross-cultural researchers meet in the field. Arguments based on field experience in research in IKS, in Zambia or Bangladesh is that the building of this global village is on an uneven ground. There is a mismatch in political and economic powers of those striving to enter the global village and these power relations affect

any research especially those of cross-culture in nature. It is the more powerful countries in the North that seem to be gaining from the globalization of knowledge. Countries like Zambia and Bangladesh, in the South, may have very little to offer as their rich economy and culture are embedded in their IKS, which are paradoxically perceived to be under threat from globalization as currently alternative knowledge to Western knowledge is ignorance. Odora (2002) has concluded that Globalization “has put ‘fishes and sharks’ in the same pond”.

However, there seem to be some contradictions in the threats perceived to be facing IKS. While Odora’s (2000) argument is that globalization aims to dilute or even kill IKS, Nyamnjoh et al. (2007) say that the real threat is the commercialization of the IKS. They say that:

“Globalization has commoditized and privatised knowledge, resulting in the knowledge economy. Knowledge that was in the public domain, owned by communities and passed down from generation to generation, has been privatized by applying intellectual property rights that confer rights on individual, effectively robbing whole communities.”

My argument is that IKS faces both threats i.e. the killing of some aspects considered (by the global corporations acting as the knowledge gatekeepers) harmful and commercializing those that are of an economic value to them. The latter threat is subtle as real owners of the knowledge may think they are benefiting when they do not to the extent that global capital does. This unfairness is seen in the example cited by Nyamnjoh et al. (2007):

“As the knowledge economy spreads its tentacles, it begins to displace IK from the hands of its owners, the communities. The knowledge is then ‘reconfigured’ in response to the asking and dictates of global capital.”

All in all, we would say despite differences in cross-cultural research, common values and principles can be established through dialogue and free sharing of knowledge. Cross-cultural research could be an effective tool to dismantle the barriers created by both the perceived Eurocentric approach to research³ and the rigid traditions, cultural beliefs, norms and values entrenched in IK. This is a view shared by many authors (Antweiler, 1996).

Methodological and Ethical Challenges: Two field experiences

Ethical concerns are a very important component to any social research (Sillitoe, Dixon & Barr, 2005). Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000, p. 347) hold that:

“Ethical concerns encountered in Educational research, in particular, can be extremely complex and subtle and can frequently place researchers in moral predicament, which may appear quite irresolvable.”

When conducting research in IK, there are ethical issues to consider. It is vital to protect those involved in the research as some of them may not be able to represent themselves in the event that they are misrepresented (Banda, 2008). Often research in IKS may have to deal with vulnerable women, men and children in a rural setting on the one hand and traditional community leaders

³ Where universal knowledge is from the North and alternative knowledge to that which is universal is ignorance and synonymous with the South.

and NGO workers who are very concerned with their privacy and importance on the other. There could be threats, as well, depending on the political environment in the area (Islam, 2009).

There are a number of contradictions and challenges that must be observed. These must be judged on their merits and demerits based on various bodies of knowledge valued in a given cultural and geographical setting. However, there are general guidelines that must be observed at all times and this is both in the North and South. For example, researchers should ensure that controlled access for sensitive information that cannot be explicitly authorized for general distribution, as determined by the perceived owners of that information, is observed. In the case of research in IK, researchers should ensure that controlled access for cultural information as determined by members of the local community or the elders in the community should be distributed to the general public only with their explicit authority. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000, p. 347) caution that this may be easier said than done as ethical issues could be complex:

“Ethical concerns encountered in educational research in particular can be extremely complex and subtle and can frequently place researchers in moral predicament, which may appear quite irresolvable.”

Keeping the discussion going on and not astray is a big challenge on the part of an interviewee as a moderator in IK research. There is always a high possibility of some participants not participating and allowing themselves to be inhibited by the others. What McNamara (1999, p. 9) sums up as challenges faced by interviewees as moderators in focus groups could be more pronounced with research in IKS involving respondents influenced by cultural norms and values:

- Sorting out what is important
- Understanding implications
- Decoding symbolism
- Unraveling complex situations
- Interpreting ambiguous behaviour
- Designing persuasion and predicting behaviour
- Developing strategies and new ideas.

The contents, participants, and social issues, which such research investigates, raise a number of ethical issues that we were aware of before beginning our field work. In accordance with the ethical guideline, we gave a clear understanding to our stakeholders about issues, such as the focus of research, the research objectives and purposes, their participation, the time schedule of research, data collection methods and techniques, privacy and confidentiality of data, and the benefits of the research. We were also aware of the ethical guidelines of the ESRC, BERA, Miles & Huberman (1994) and Tacchi, Slater & Hearn (2003).

Miles & Huberman (1994) elaborately explain and discuss the ethical guidelines for qualitative research. They identify the worthiness of the project (i.e., is my contemplated study worth doing?); competence boundaries; informed consent; benefits, costs and reciprocity; harm and risk; honesty and trust; privacy, confidentiality and anonymity; interventions and advocacy; research integrity and quality; ownership of data and conclusions; use and misuse of results; and conflicts, dilemmas and trade-offs. In their summary, they state that dealing with ethical issues “effectively involves heightened awareness, negotiation, and making trade-offs among ethical dilemmas, rather than the application of rules” (for details please see Miles & Huberman, 1994). Their advice is to anticipate: advance thinking during the early stages of research design. Anticipating challenges ahead can help avoid problems later. On the other hand, Tacchi, Slater & Hearn (2003) suggest the following:

- Explain myself (researcher)
- Respect confidences
- Treat people sensitively
- Explore sensitive issues
- Never put people at risk or endanger their well-being.

The two research experiences have shown challenges and dilemmas that researchers meet in the field which require prudence and shrewdness (Sillitoe, Dixon & Barr, 2005; Moahi, 2007). From the two research experiences shared in this paper, we will show how the ethical issues create dilemmas on different cross-cultural issues.

Zambian Experience

There were a number of challenges that I faced during my field work. Most of them border on methods and techniques on collecting data and ethical issues to be observed. The first lesson I learnt was that methodology and methods should take into account local scenarios and respondents' perceptions on given research works or on research in general. Various methods and techniques used in a given methodology should not be detached from the contents and meanings that are ever being constructed (Ntuli, 2002). Each method and technique used in research in areas such as IKS should take into account the cultural and practices of other countries and their peoples. While a number of these methods may show considerable success, there could also be challenges and dilemmas posed by them as observed in the listed items below:

1. Power relations

While interviews may appear to be very effective tool in IKS research, generally, they pose a number of challenging situations. One notable weakness of interviews I observed during my field work was that they can be subjective and the participants may be unwilling to report on their true feelings as a result of being too conscious of the power structures and gender relations embedded in IKS. While settling down the participants by making introductions and starting by asking questions are considered to be ways of encouraging the respondents for fruitful participation (Patton, 1990), as is the case with research in the North, the situation is not the same with research in the South, especially with research in IKS involving traditional leaders and elders as interviewees.

Focus group discussion as a tool for data collection is not spared from this dilemma. The conventional rule about focus group discussions is that the moderator (who is usually the researcher) must ensure that all group members contribute to the discussion and must avoid letting one participant's opinions dominate (McNamara, 1999). However, the issue of power relations is so strong (with research in IKS) that there is always a possibility of some participants not participating and allowing themselves to be inhibited by those perceived to be higher in status or age. For example, it is considered wrong among many African people to disagree among themselves in the presence of an outsider (who could be a researcher moderating a focus group discussion) or to openly disagree with an outsider (researcher). Culturally, many Africans would not like to disappoint a visitor or stranger even when they do not agree with his/her views. This may imply the researcher not getting the true reflections of his/her respondents on the issue. Such knowledge of people's culture would prepare a researcher to be shrewd when collecting data. Above all, this may explain why when I asked a question, respondents firstly asked what my views were before they could give theirs on the issue. For example, in the interviews conducted with

all traditional respondents (Banda, 2008), before respondents would answer any question, they would always want to get my views (researcher's) on the same issue and the common question was, "What do you think about it yourself? Tell us your answer before we tell you ours."

This phenomenon may be against general ethical principles in research in the North. The assumption is that such questions would weaken the validity and reliability of the answers to be given. The response a researcher may give could influence the answers the respondents are likely to give. This observation shows that students from the South doing research in home countries while being supervised by researchers in the North risk being questioned or even failed by their supervisors once they follow the dictate they meet in the field. Supervisors need to take into account such variations that researchers meet in a real world rather than what is stipulated in research guidelines on ethical issues.

Furthermore, knowledge of power relations among respondents dictated by cultural beliefs is vital in conducting research in the South. Such knowledge of people's culture would prepare a researcher to be shrewd when collecting data. For example, culturally, many Africans would not like to disappoint a visitor or stranger (researcher) by giving opposing views. This, therefore, implies that even when they do not agree with his/her views, they may choose to agree so that they are not misunderstood. This may imply the researcher not getting the true reflections of his/her respondents on the issue.

In the same vein, disagreeing with an elderly person is also considered abnormal and unethical among many traditional Africans. This is mainly because wisdom is believed to be drawn from age and experience (Banda, 2008). The older one is the more experienced and the wiser one on any issue that may arise. That may explain why, usually, an elderly person is expected to speak first and the rest are expected to agree verbally or simply by nodding their heads. In this case, a researcher must realize that keeping quiet and nodding heads are signs of active participation in a focus group discussion, for example. This may not be the case with research in the North, where being silent in a discussion is a sure sign of being inactive and passive.

2. The all-answers-are-correct technique

Interviews are a very useful way of collecting data. As noted by Bassegy (1995), people are more willing to talk in an interview than the case would be if they were asked to write. This is true with research in IK where the possibility of involving respondents who do not know how to write is very high. When respondents are told to be free and contribute in any way, they often open up and share their views on the matter. However, my experience during field work is that when I told respondents that there were neither right nor wrong answers, I could see that it weakened the whole essence of the discussions. Some respondents (traditional leaders) found it offending as they assumed that I (researcher) was insinuating that they would be telling me wrong things. One of the respondents asked me why I had come to them if I thought they could be telling me wrong things. I also observed that it was difficult for local and traditional leaders and elders to fully and freely participate in any discussion without feeling judged by the researcher who is asking questions. This may suggest that care is needed when devising a focus group discussion guide.

3. Limitations imposed on researcher

Although I am *Chewa* by tribe, researching among my own *Chewa* people still posed challenges. I still faced dilemmas that a researcher from the North could possibly have faced though from a different perspective. I noticed that a researcher with formal education and credentials doing research in his area may not be treated hundred percent like the local respondents. I was not

treated as a fellow *Chewa* person despite using the local *Chewa* language with them. I had to wear three 'jackets' during research i.e. a researcher, a *Chewa* and a person with formal education, perceived to be living a better working class life in town. These aspects always imposed some limitations on the participation in these groups. Sentiments like, "you are educated and what can you learn from us" were uttered by some respondents. This may imply that a researcher from the North (especially white) may be perceived to be one who already knows everything thereby affecting their participations and answers they may give.

4. Seeking permission to take part in the research, record the proceedings, take picture or use pseudo names

While permission to record the proceedings has to be sought in research in the North, this is not always the case with research in the South, especially with research in IK. To have one's voice recorded and played on radio is an achievement and therefore does not require permission. However, this could compromise the validity and reliability of the data collected from some interviewees. They may say a lot of things that may not necessarily be true but just to impress the researcher. The use of pseudo names to protect the respondents is another issue which could be debatable. In the case where the researcher could be dealing with people who are not highly literate, there may be need to protect them through the use of pseudo names. However, during my field work, I noticed that telling interviewees that confidentiality would be maintained by not mentioning their names but using fictitious ones in the report was construed as crookedness on my part as a researcher. I noticed that this could breed suspicion and withholding of information if not handled well. But looking at the type of information they were giving, I took it upon myself to use the pseudo names against their wishes but just to protect them.

One notable ethical issue observed in research in the North is centred on researchers informing participants (clients) that they would not be coerced into taking part but that they would be given an opportunity to make an informed and free choice to participate in the study. Additionally, respondents are told that they could freely withdraw from the focus group or interviews at any time without risk or prejudice (Fairbrother, 2001). Such may not apply with research in the South, especially with research in IK. Based on my field work experience, such an observation by the researcher could be taken as a sign of lack of seriousness on the part of the researcher. Clients may even ask why you came to them in the first place. Worse still, they may even think that you (researcher) did not take them seriously and, therefore, are wasting their time.

5. The culture of rewarding respondents

Like in the experiences observed in Bangladeshi, it was also thorny to give a well-justified purpose and objective of my academic research, as the traditional chiefs, elders and other local leaders and people used to think that such kind of research meant that I (Researcher) would provide them with some immediate rewards like food or money. At one focus group discussion with the chief's counsellors, one of them wondered if the things they were proposing would be implemented by the government as quickly as possible. They also wondered if I had anything for them like what others do after discussing such issues with them. This is the common practice by research organisations from the North, and some NGOs. Some traditional leaders were visibly frustrated when they saw that there was no material gain from me (the research). With the chiefs, this is common knowledge that you do not see a chef (for any issue) empty-handed. It is a known and chargeable offence to do that. So for all the four traditional chiefs interviewed, these traditional norms were observed and these issues were discussed with my supervisor before commencing

my research because I had fore knowledge of them. (My supervisor gave me some gifts for the traditional chiefs).

This means that knowledge that some conventional ethical guidelines cannot satisfy some local issues, such as cultural and traditional habits, norms and values, is vital especially to researcher from the North and those supervisors from the North working with students from the South. Some students may not reflect such practices in their research plans presented to supervisors for fear such acts would be misconstrued to be bribes and weaken the validity and reliability of data collected.

6. Mode of forming Focus groups

Organising focus group discussions following ethical issues considered important in research in the North may pose a challenge in research in IKS in the South. In determining the number of people in a given focus group in IK research, Krueger & Casey (2000, p. 71) suggest that:

“The focus group is characterized by homogeneity but with sufficient variation among participants to allow for constructing opinion.”

While such procedural steps would be considered to be universal and could produce good results in research in the North, they tend to be a stumbling block with research in IKS in the South where power structures are imbedded in IKS influencing any discussion that may follow. During my field work, expert sampling proved to be useful to select some individuals to include in one or two follow-up focus groups. This may suggest that expert sampling (assembling of a sample of persons with known or demonstrable experience and expertise in some areas) is an effective way of forming a focus group in research in the North. My observation was that it may prove to be unrealistic in research in IKS to think of convening an expert panel consisting of persons with acknowledged experience and insight on the topic (Warren, Sikkerveer & Brokensha, 1995). Individual interviews of such experts gave better results than focus group discussions. Reasons could be many and varying yet vital for researchers from the North who plan to conduct research in the South, especially research in IKS. Still, on the formation of focus groups, I observed that there may be no need to follow rigid rules imposed by general ethical consideration. Some of these rules and guidelines are that the group must be dynamic to enable it to focus on the most important topics and issues; that groups must be relatively consistent in order for participants to have shared views; that focus groups should aim at providing opportunities to bring together people either of the same social group or different to discuss one topic; that participants are to be free to agree or disagree and that respondents could decide to gather at a place of their choice so that the discussion take a normal setting, and conducive to a free and open discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Fairbrother, 2001).

However, these issues may not be viewed the same in research in the South and especially with research in IKS. For example, during my field work, I discovered that it was very easy to come up with a focus group using existing normal settings rather than trying to form new ones from prescribed social groups. My personal experience in this area was that through opportunistic interviews on buses (especially those on long trips) or indeed in a social setting, like at a funeral, it was very easy to come up with ‘focus group discussion’. You would start a discussion with a person sitting next to you and within a short time those sitting next would join in the discussion. You would easily have the whole bus, including the driver, becoming one large focus group. At two occasions for example, I had half the bus contributing to the discussion on the relevance of the current school curriculum. This is one thing you cannot dare to try in the West as you may cover the whole distance of your journey without exchanging a single word with the person

sitting next to you. Funerals in the West are private issues while in the South they are social gatherings where one can even find his or her future spouse (some men have chosen their spouses after being impressed with the way one cries⁴). This means that rather than making formal focus group discussion, taking advantage of the already existing group settings or gatherings would be beneficial and easy. In my research I managed to collect vital information from people in such natural settings like on a bus, on funeral gatherings and other social settings. Usually people sit in their age or social groups already in these settings. Information is sometimes given even without soliciting it. A mere complement on a tie one is wearing would prompt that person to disclose information relating to when he bought the tie, how the money was obtained and, if borrowed, how the borrower earned that money, etc.

These, I feel, are experiences that must be shared by other researchers and supervisors of would-be supervisors so that challenges and dilemmas faced by various researchers are appreciated and judged with a human and cultural face.

Bangladesh Experience

Before describing my Bangladesh experience, I would like to mention some statements which were considered in the research as relevant to the ethical guidelines for conducting my field work. The research forwards four quotations, one from Greiner (1998) and three from the ESRC Commissioned Inquiry, which partly cover the challenges, risks and limitations of the ethical guidelines that I faced throughout my fieldwork period.

- "...while there is now a widely accepted understanding that participation as a respondent in research carries with it an emotional component and a consequent need for the researcher to be sensitive and aware of ethical implications, there is little corresponding awareness of the emotional impact on the researcher" (Greiner, 1998).
- "Qualitative researchers may experience a range of risks. Some of these risks relate to the physical well-being of researchers and correspondent to conventional health and safety considerations in employment of all kinds. It is not difficult to think of situations in which researchers may be at risk of violence or other physical danger" (ESRC Commissioned Inquiry, quoted from Nicholson, undated).
- "Researchers may become emotionally threatened, where, for example, the data being collected are distressing or the settings emotionally taxing. These different types of risk reflect the objectives of the research, the settings in which it is conducted and the characteristics of participants in the research, both 'subjects' and 'researchers'" (ESRC Commissioned Inquiry, quoted from Nicholson, undated).
- "Researcher risks are a matter of urgent interest to a range of parties, not just researchers, but also research supervisors, research funders, insurers, ethicists, occupational health and safety personnel and other: Good practice for researchers and supervisors and extended to university ethics committees and research grants boards" (ESRC Commissioned Inquiry, quoted from Nicholson, undated).

⁴ In many African countries, women are the ones who cry at funerals. Men do not cry as that is a sign of weakness. Women do their crying assignment so well that some start crying even before they find out who has died

The ESRC Commissioned Inquiry states mainly three kind of risks: physical, emotional, and risks as a matter of urgent interest to a range of parties. On the other hand, Greiner (1998) mentions both emotional and ethical sensitiveness. I think that most researchers in qualitative studies had to face more or less of these risks during their field work. One of the most challenging aspects was to follow and implement the ethical guidelines I followed, provided by, for example, Miles & Huberman (1994) or Tacchi, Slater & Hearn (2003). I found these Western ethical guidelines were difficult to implement in the Bangladesh context, where I found some cross-cultural limitations. These limitations became unbreakable difficulties, when those attached with the local people's poor socio-economic, cultural and political conditions. The following discussion outlines some of these dilemmas that I faced in my field work.

1. Poor socio-economic and cultural conditions

One key example of this was that it was difficult to give a well-justified understanding of the purpose and objective of my academic research, as the local people used to think that such research (which they call *jarip* (survey), usually done by NGOs) meant that the NGOs would provide them some immediate services. But they were frustrated when they learnt that the research was not involved with such kind of initiative. This limitation had an effect on other ethical issues, such as benefits, costs and reciprocity; honesty and trust; privacy, confidentiality and anonymity; and research integrity and quality. Moreover, these ethical guidelines could not satisfy some local issues, such as religion, local leadership, cultural habits, norms and values. For example, at times the relations with NGO staff members and community leaders were so difficult that the community leaders openly commented against the NGO staff members, which raised questions of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity; and the honesty and trust of the research. These challenges were particularly difficult to overcome.

2. Physical harm and safety issues

There are some risks, for example physical risk, to my personal safety. During my first visit at *Mostofapur Bazar* for Practical Action Bangladesh (PAB), I was noticed by some local leaders (so-called political leaders). Some local individuals feared that I had some inquiry on political issues. In this instance, my assistant and I were subject to physical harassment despite our attempts to explain the purposes of our research. Unfortunately, many of the NGO staff members are politically involved in Bangladesh and such levels of risk arise when introducing oneself as a researcher doing research on NGOs' activities. Emotional threats from different interest groups were very common throughout my field work. For example, NGO staff members were not as hospitable as I had anticipated and this was in itself an unforeseen challenge in the research process. This situation was at its worst in an area office; they did not appreciate the relevance of any kind of research that might contribute toward their policy procedures. I guessed their interest and motives might be different, relating to commercial motives or that they simply did not want to be challenged at all. My interest and the staff members' interests therefore did not always go hand in hand.

3. Gaps between the interests of the researcher and the ones of the respondents

Another reality was the gap between the expectations of researchers and NGOs. For example, I could not see policy documents for four months during my fieldwork; I could not even view

the whole documents at my house. I was told that they were very secret and only for office usage, or 'not permitted to take it out'. After much correspondence, they agreed to allow me to photocopy some documents after five months of my field work. Many of the field staff members especially in PAB were not cooperative in arranging the FGD sessions to share their experience about blacksmithing. They changed my FGD and in-depth case study schedules several times to say that their staff members were absent from the office.

During FGD sessions, some of the main staff members were absent, and they were not happy to discuss with me in those sessions. I found some of them were less focused through their reluctance and in some cases continued their work duties, which made matters very difficult. In addition, I got the return of my questionnaires from some of the main staff members four months later, while many had been returned just three days before I left my field. A number of respondents left many questions blank, which implied perhaps a lack of seriousness. This was the picture of the NGOs which were not interested to coordinate and collaborate with me as researcher. I have contemplated upon two assumptions from the above. The first is that staff members were not interested in such kind of research, because they wanted to remain as they were without being challenged to change. Secondly, they were doing something which they felt was professionally unsavoury and therefore did not want to disclose this.

4. Difficult to build up rapport

As indicated, one of the limitations of the research was in building an effective rapport with the NGO staff members and community people. This position offered a sense of both distance and closeness by affording me a certain depth of understanding and empathy with participants. Azaola (2006) found three principal challenges in his PhD field work, which included gaining participants' permission and trust, engaging them with his project, and building rapport with participants. I encountered similar experiences in my research as the area of study was comparatively new in Bangladesh. The contents and concepts used in my research were also new and the stakeholders had a hard time understanding the link between the concepts, theories and practices. Most of them, even the staff members, could not always comprehend what I wanted to convey when discussing concepts, such as indigenous knowledge, global knowledge, social capital, community empowerment, indigenisation/localisation, and knowledge transfer. There was difficulty in connecting these concepts with the NGOs' interventions and capacities. Initially, participants were at times somewhat unclear about my research purpose, and it took a considerable amount of time to gain their emotional support, to build up proper rapport and trust.

To sum up the above discussion of my field experience in Bangladesh, I could say that I was thoroughly challenged by discovering and interpreting the importance of what had been observed, and by establishing a reasonable correlation between what had not been observed and the conclusions drawn in my research. In the case of IK, investigating this issue was more complicated and sensitive. There were some aspects about the community peoples' expectations regarding their development by NGOs, which gave them an opportunity to discuss and compare with the issues what NGOs were doing. These included: how the NGOs were working, what was their contribution for community development, what the community peoples' expectations were and what NGOs' interventions were, and what were the outputs to fulfil their expectations and so on. I had a number of impressions throughout my investigation. For example, my feeling was that I saw far more variation across rural to urban and urban to rural in conceptualisation of the principal concepts used in my research, such as indigenous knowledge and global knowledge and community development within the concepts of social capital and community empowerment.

Findings on the significance of educational research in IKS

Educational research in IK has the ability to:

- Inform, enlighten and guide the policy-makers, donor nations, non governmental organisations (NGOs) the community as practitioners thereby improving the relationship among them and enhance development (Kelly, 1994).
- Influence other researchers in the same field (IKS) thereby increasing the need to investigate a particular issue even to greater depths. The experience from both countries is that the perceived custodians of IK hold that what works is what they have experienced rather than on trying new knowledge through research. More research is needed to find ways of deconstructing such notions in people's minds.
- Provides a window to show what works and what does not and this data is drawn from the community as practitioners perceived to be custodians of IK in line with current developments. In the absence of research to validate IK, other forms of knowledge from IKS will continue to be ignored by the policy-makers who follow the top-down approach in policy-making.
- Provide alternative forms of knowledge that may be integrated with the formal knowledge to enhance the achievement of the millennial goals.
- Promote and enhance initiatives to document IK, identify the perceived custodians of IK and come up with ways of rewarding them.
- Open possibilities of sharing IK with other international research bodies and institutions. This could be one way of universalizing IK.
- Educational research in IK could offer an opportunity to traditional and local leaders to see their own findings influencing, directly or indirectly, policy-makers. This could provide a great deal of satisfaction. The climax of that satisfaction is when the community, elders and local and traditional leaders are able to discern their influence on educational practice and to feel that they actually made a difference to the learning and teaching of their children.
- There is an opportunity offered to traditional and local leaders and the community in general to get involved in the field of research in schools in their areas (action research for example). This could be beneficial as the community could have a strong influence on the interpretation of policy and have a sense of ownership of projects and developmental agendas brought about by findings from such bottom-up research efforts.
- Research in IK could awaken the interest of funding bodies and obtain grants for further research and even for integration of IK and the formal school curricula.

The paper does not in any way try to romanticise research in IKS neither does it try to portray it as the only panacea to all the problems facing research. There are a number of threats that the two research findings have identified such as the following:

- When research in IK is devised and initiated by the funding organisations often from the developed nations, there is a danger of the community (practitioners) not fully taking the programme as theirs but belonging to the funding organisations or government.
- The above threat is compounded by the situation where most of the researchers in IK in developing nations are from the West with little or no knowledge of the needs and desires of the people they research on let alone their culture. This scenario has

seen a number of well-intended research oriented programmes dying a natural death even before they take-off prompting writers like Watson (1993, p. 100) to paint such a picture about research in Third world countries “The landscape of the Third world today is littered with the carcasses of the pilot projects that failed to pilot anybody anywhere.”

- Researchers in IK from the West often target areas of research that may attract funding, leaving out really problematic areas that require agent research and policy intervention.
- Often international funding organisations shun funding research in IK but only do so when the research is to their benefit.
- When findings from research in IK do not match with the existing desires and expectations of the policy-makers or funding organizations, they do not influence any policy change and IKS is labelled as being rigid and resisting change (CERI, 1995).
- There is a possibility of researchers to tilt findings to suit expectations of the funding or donor organisations for future prospects. Fairbrother (2000, p. 27) supports the point given above:

“One contributor speaking about her own personal research and supported by others said she would not risk her university’s standing by carrying out research which was not perceived to be needed by policy- makers or commissioning agencies. She said it would be professional suicide to do so.”

- Research in IK is often considered not to be technically competent and ethically sound even when it could be vital, interesting, original and significant to the needs of the local community and developing nations.
- Some conventional ethical guidelines cannot satisfy some local issues, such as cultural and traditional habits, norms and values.

Recommendations, lessons and conclusions

In IKS research, all stakeholders must be involved. Nobody should be at the receiving end. No matter how clear the findings of any piece of research and the policy born out of it may be, as long as the practitioners (agency i.e. teachers, pupils, parents, and the community) are at the receiving end of that policy developed by the structure (Government; research bodies and organisations) there are bound to be implications affecting the practice.

Often research in IKS includes vulnerable people such as women and the so-called ‘uneducated’ ones and these are often not consulted. When funding organisations are loud in the piloting of the research programme rather than all the stakeholders, ownership of the research programme is reserved for the funding organisations or governments, thereby compromising the continuity of the programme. In the event when that research is donor funded, the programme dies when donor money is finished.

The implications raised above mean that while educational research in IKS may influence policy change or formulation, policy-makers and researchers must put in place mechanisms that will ensure that rights of ownership of that knowledge and skills by those perceived to be the custodians are protected and not surrendered to international bodies and institutions.

We could also argue that there may be no global ethics in research but that researchers should aim at negotiating and establishing ethical principles based on people’s culture of a given place and time. Rather than aiming at fulfilling the so-called general ethical principles, consideration should be given to specific cultural values with a hope to combine them so as to satisfy this global village. Cross-Culture Research into IK, recognition and appreciation of IKS, in general, could be a great

source of healing of therapeutic import in the context of detrimental, disproportion, falsification, trivialization and neglect as inflicted by the Eurocentric education and governance (Kawagley, 1995). Tapping into the intellectual resources associated with IK through cross-culture research may not only result as cost-effective but also relevant and indispensable for environmentally and ecologically sensitive activity as observed by Kawagley (1995).

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