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**Documentation of Nigerian Indigenous Knowledge System:
the role of the Library**

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Documentation of Nigerian Indigenous Knowledge System: the role of the Library

Abstract

This paper is on documentation of Nigerian indigenous knowledge system (IKS) as a national heritage through the role of the library as catalyst. The paper used literature analysis, recognizance survey and observations to explicitly describe the concept of IKS and its various sustainable ethos; it illustrates the components of the Nigerian IKS including the encompassed spiritual and physical sustainable elements that helps to promote its long time survival. Also treated in the paper are the relevance of IKS to the Nigerian national development; the challenges of IKS development in the country and the role of the library for sustainable collection and documentation of IKS for national development among others.

Key words: *Culture, Indigenous Knowledge System, people, Library, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Issues patterning the role of the library in the documentation of Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) development in Nigeria is now assuming a new position within the domain of the library and information service discourse. The awareness and need for the documentation and preservation of this cultural heritage for rebirth, is so apparent in developing appropriate strategies using the library as a catalyst.

Generally, Indigenous Knowledge system (IKS) has been identified as the treasures of local communities. In Nigeria, IKS is not documented because hitherto, it has been regarded as primitive and unscientific knowledge system and therefore marginalized in preference to the Western knowledge. But today, the sophisticated knowledge value and the narratives have become the esteem of the international communities. IFLA (2002) recognized the significant relevance and values of the indigenous knowledge system (IKS) and then called on countries to integrate IKS in the planning and preservation of their cultural heritage and as solutions to modern issues. Similarly, the World Bank in 2004 described IKS as the pathway to global development. Furthermore, UNESCO (2019) acknowledged indigenous knowledge system as unique ways of understanding the basic components of global cultural diversity and the foundation for locally-appropriate development. Indigenous knowledge therefore, is about the local people and their high sense of values rooted in their culture which has aided their long time peaceful survival and development.

Amanda (2008) acknowledged African IKS as about the perceptions, learning knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, etc. by which people handle things in their environment such as land, health care, farming, education, social-economic, political, cultural and spirituality. Similarly, Chikare et al (2012) posited that IKS encompasses spiritual relations and the natural environment, the use of natural resources, language, social organization, values, institutions and laws. In another view, Omawumi & Oludare (2013) declared IKS as an oral knowledge held by traditional people based on experience and adaptation to their local culture and environment for their development of agriculture, art and craft, medicine and natural resource management. Adeyomo & Adebayo (2017) acknowledged indigenous knowledge as a way of life, skill experiences, culture, insight and values embrace by people in a community. Correspondingly, Twindouroyo (2019) affirmed

IKS as beliefs, practices, skills, technologies and experiences that are key to facilitating wholeness and stability of a local community. Indigenous Knowledge system (IKS) therefore, embraces all facets of a people's life as rooted in their local language, farming, food, religion and rituals, regeneration, local technology, norms and values, traditional health care, fashion, music and dances, storytelling, dressing, etc. On the whole, it is an interconnected long time cultural practices which encompasses the art, science and social sciences. Its oral structure and perfect knowledge system are accumulated to exploit and attain quality life in a habitual cultural environment.

In Nigerian, the Indigenous community people have stable social order of equal opportunities, practical education which emphasizes local agriculture, traditional health care method, local technology and trade. Adebayo & Adeyemo (2017) noted that, indigenous knowledge provides the basis for problem-solving and represents vital component of global knowledge for developmental issues. This assertion explains why modern nations should explore the Indigenous Knowledge system as national heritage for sustainable modern development.

But despite the unique characteristics and splendors, IKS in Nigeria is not given its pride of place. Makinde & Shorunke, (2013) lamented that IKS have been infiltrated, marginalized, neglected and suppressed by the Western interferences due to ignorance and arrogance of the people. UNESCO (2019) similarly grieved the non-properly documentation of IKS for posterity. These assertions are not far-fetched as Makinde & Shorunke (2013) noted that the Indigenous knowledge resides more with the community elders most of whom are passing away because of their old age and that much of their traditional and mystical experiential knowledge have not been recorded or documented anywhere. Therefore, there is fear that much of these Indigenous knowledge system may be lost if something urgent is not done by proper documentation. It is on this premise that these authors used literature appraisal and recognizance survey on six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, to conceptualize and analyze the cultural practices and traditional components of Nigerian IKS to assert the role of the library as catalyst for the documentation and preservation of this national legacy for development.

An Overview of Nigerian IKS

Nigeria is a people with over 250 multilingual ethnic groups with each, her own cultural norms and values, religious practices, food, dressing, unity of purpose and accord which have survived them and their systems for ages. Ogbebor (2011) identified certain traditional components that has strengthen the sustainability of IKS and have helped to reshape the values and attitudes of the people in effort to preserve their cultural heritage. These components which among others include the local dialect, folk stories, songs, dramas, legends, proverbs and myths are used in conceptualizing the teaching, learning and entertainment of IKS away from direct appreciative. Ogbebor (2011) believed that local experience and communication will continue to facilitate communities' common survivals. Owusu-Ansah & Mji, (2013) also observed that community wholeness and harmony are embedment of cultural values. In another view, Anyira, Oghenovo & Nwabueze (2010) citing Nakata and Langton (2005) acknowledged Nigeria IKS as embedded in storytelling, songs, folklore, proverbs, cultural values, norms, beliefs, rituals, local languages and agricultural practices including the development of plants species and animal breed as pride of the local communities. These conceptual definitions about IKS are the pathological background for the evaluation and explanation of the indigenous people and their knowledge system which have endured their sustainable growth.

Recognizance survey carried out in the cause of this study revealed that Nigerian IKS are better conceptualized in her local dialects, oral literature, religion festivals, agricultural practices, drama, music and dances including artefacts in multiplicity and highly cherished in the global arena. On several occasions, the Yoruba, Kanuri, Igbo, Idoma, Benin, Hausa, etc. music, dances, dramas and artefacts have appeared and won several awards in the global scene reflecting the traditional initiatives and aesthetic creativity and innovation of the brilliant indigenous cultural people. This can be further explained with the Benin artefacts which also show a long identity of global exploitation for its narratives and knowledge values for various developments. The evidence here, is the symbol used for the First African Black Festival of Art and Culture (FESTAC 77) held in Lagos in 1977 which was a replica of Queen Idia ivory mask artefact looted by the British during the Benin expedition in 1897 and reproduced for the festival. In fact, before the British Punitive Expeditions of Benin Kingdom, large quantity of Benin artefacts had been exposed to the eyes and interest of the world through the trade activities of the

Portuguese and other European explorers who visited the Ancient Benin Kingdom. The artefacts were seen as the first source of prehistoric documents and mnemonic objects for the Europeans and writers of Benin and African history. The Artefacts were items of identity and civilization through which Nigerian Ancient Kingdoms were exposed as vivid Kingdoms with peculiarities that cannot be undermined by the Western World.

Components of the Nigerian IKS

Our recognizance survey revealed that the Nigerian IKS comprised many ethos and elements for national identity. These essentials have been regrouped and treated here for convenience as following:

Oral Literature: This is practiced in almost every community. There were cultural diversities with which each community was identified with its own literature. In all the communities surveyed, the indigenous literature encouraged cultural literacy, knowledge sharing, personal expressions and imaginative dimensions and creative humor through storytelling about legends, folklores, lyrics, praise songs, fables, proverbs, riddles, poems, etc. They were chanted in verbal prose, dialogues, recitation or chanted with enhanced aesthetic effectiveness. The presenters utter words to entertain the listeners' endorsement. Generally, oral literature are used to entertain family or community elders or guests during festivals, leisure time or as tales by moonlights.

Dressing, Arts and Craft: By and large, the Nigerian indigenous communities are among the richest dressed cultures in the world. From community to community, many of the fashion accessories were observed to hold royalty, beauty, wealth and strength of a dignified cultural peoples. Each occasion has its dressing and fashion different from community to community. Examples of such dressing outfit include the popular Akwete cloth weaved in Ukwu, Abia State, the Aso-Oke in Yorubaland, the Adire dress from Abeokuta, Ogun State, bead dressing in Benin kingdom, dashiki in Hausa, the agbada dress now generally use in all communities on various occasions, etc.

Religion and Festivals: Akinde (2008), Ogbemor (2011), Adeyomo & Adebayo (2017) affirmed that the Nigeria indigenous religions and festivals are diverse in belief, spiritualities and practices. There is a general belief among all the communities about a supreme creator, spirits and deities, fear of death and respect for the dead.

The deities and spirits are honored through libation and consultation resulting often in sacrifices of animals, food and drinks for cleansing and appeasements of gods. These belief systems are predominantly rooted in spirits and deities worship in shrines, mountains and rivers and are assumed to have direct power in human affairs.

Local Education: Customarily, IKS exists in oral form with knowledge from the elders who give directives on common carry out experimentations in agriculture, environmental control and management, herbal health care delivery system with spirituality and ritual attachments, food preparation, music and dance techniques, folklore, rites and communication shared over time into distinctive cultural knowledge. Owusu-Ansah & Mji (2013) noted that indigenous learning was mostly peer oriented and participatory with less adult instruction. Similarly, Amanda (2008) citing Battistle & Henderson (2000) posited that IK can be appreciated through its traditional teaching methods of a particular community through apprenticeship, etc. in which the knowledge system originates.

Traditional medicine: This practice was still very much recognized and accepted in every community that was surveyed with some spiritual attachments applied. The practitioners include the indigenous healers such as herbalists, traditional birth attendants, bone setters, fortune tellers/doctors, etc. The efficacy of their drugs and practices over the years have made them highly valuable and well known in their community and beyond. Makinde and Shorunke (2013) submitted that while conventional medicine focuses on experiment and disease causing pathogens, traditional medicine use variety of approaches to diagnose, treat and prevent illnesses using herbs, spiritual sediment, animals and plant spices such as the ginger, garlic, turmeric, cinnamon, etc. The authors also remarked that many pharmaceuticals are today exploiting traditional knowledge to develop certain drugs for treatment of certain ailments including stress, fatigue, cancer, diabetes, among many others. This assertion explains the confidence imposed on the efficacy of traditional herbal medicine by Nigerians even in the domain of the orthodox medicine.

Entertainments: These include local carnivals, theatres, dramas and dances, new yam festivals, local games and wrestling, drums and drumming, rite of passage – marriage, funeral and birth rites celebrated in many parts of the country. Examples

include the Arugugu fishing festival in Kebbi State, Igue festival in Benin City, Eyo cultural dance in Lagos State, Ofala festival in Anambra State, Durba Festival in Kano, Zaria and Kastina, Nupe day in Kogi state, Masquerade festivals in many parts of the country, etc. During annual festivals, most of these communities lavishly display their aesthetic rich cultures to the admirations of the indigenous people and foreigners who have made such events their annual tourist attractions. These occasions were also noted to be garnished with various local dishes and drinks unique for the occasions.

Indigenous Technology: This involves various indigenous inventions, techniques and applications as available in almost everywhere. Modupe (2019) identified the local technologies to include pottery, blacksmithing, palm oil production, garri processing, wood curving, bronze casting, etc. Other indigenous technology include the cloth making technology for the Aso Oke and the dying of Adire in Yorubaland, pottery making among the Ladi Kwale and Lokpanta people in Niger and Abia States, Smithing and brass making in Oyo, Edo, Adamawa and Bornu States, leather works in Sokoto State, the Nok and other cultures for the fabrication of iron tools and weapons for hunting and welfare, farming implements such as hoes, cutlass, water cans, knives, etc.

Relevance of IKS to National Development

Indigenous knowledge system have been acknowledged to improve multi-ethnic understanding and encouraging the various communities' cultural facet of development. UNESCO (2017) re-echoed the need for member nations to develop appropriate and effective methods for recording, protecting and revitalizing the indigenous knowledge. UNESCO's believe that both the indigenous knowledge system and the science, whether in the domains of environmental conservation, education, or medical practice, each have their place for continuing respectful coexistence. This UNESCO's postulate is a strength to building IKS sustainability as a fine information source base for national development.

Adedipe & Ayinde (2004) also recognized indigenous knowledge as an essential attribute to the development of agro-ecosystems. This was observed in many communities visited as demonstrated by the people's inter-dependence on land-use systems, crop rotation, shifting cultivation, mixed cropping, soil fertility, pest and weed management control systems, use of farm manure such as animal

dump, fowl waste, etc. for their sustainable agricultural system. Through these practices, it was observed that many farmers were consistently able to increase their level of food production and shifted from subsistence farmers to commercial farmers without bank loan or government assistance.

Chikaire, et al (2012) citing Warren & Cashman (1988) specified that IK enable diverse indigenous people across the world to adapt to their environmental changes and societal dynamics and develop their own systems to manage their local resources. This development is substantiated by the patterns of agricultural system, conveyed in the local dialect and observed to be in active balance with the community system through innovations evolvments from within the system as well as those accepted from other native system and from the domestic and international agricultural systems. It is on this basis, no doubt, that Chikaire, et al (2012) called on people with sound knowledge of biology, ecology and resources management, use of social sciences with skills of translating cultural information to document these evidences so that they can be understood and use by other cultures.

The ethos of indigenous knowledge in this digital era, are essential for the preservation and access to the rich Nigerian indigenous knowledge. Adebayo & Adeyomo (2017) remarked that Nigerian traditional knowledge may be totally lost if the knowledge are not suitably documented, preserved and accessed. According to the authors, through documentation it is possible to explore whether solutions for a given problem can be useful and applied to a different country now or in time. Documentation facilitates knowledge sharing and collaborative research for developmental pathway. Onyima (2016) believed that preservation of cultural heritage is capable of promoting collective consciousness in terms of unity, oneness, nationalism and fostering peaceful co-existence. No doubt, Akinde (2008) called for creative, technical and people skills to transform IKS to allow people share information about their heritage and cultural practices.

Also, through diversity of knowledge, certain evidences and claims by indigenous people can be validated. For instance, Onyima (2016) affirmed that oral tradition has proved its role as a vital instrument for professionals like archaeologists and ethnographers to locate and identified some cultural heritage sites/areas for further studies and preservation. Debris of archaeological activities

in cultural landscape have been known to provide raw materials for local iron industry. Documentation of such studies and activities can be vital data for research and planning. Again, such documents could facilitate and provide the match and identity of cultural pathways as real evidence in the resolutions of conflicts among communities. Once more, the documented evidence could aid global investors to analyze community wholeness during investment planning.

In the health care center, traditional health system is complementary to the orthodox health care system. Many pharmaceutical companies and stakeholders in health care industries are in many communities collaborating with the indigenous healers such as herbalists, traditional birth attendants, bone setters, etc. to explore cure to certain illnesses and diseases beyond the orthodox cure. Also, many green vegetables eatable by indigenous people for their antibiotics or nutritional values are now used for orthodox medicine. Mensah et al (2008) reported the nutritional values of twelve green leafy vegetables in Edo indigenous food which are also components of traditional herbal preparation including fruits for managing various common ailments such as: *Amaranthus cruentus* for treatment of tapeworm, expellant and relief of respiratory disease; *Telferia occidentalis* for treatment of Anemia; *Celosia argentea* for Diuretic, cough and diarrhea treatment; *Talinum triangulare* for the treatment of Diuretic, gastro-intestinal disorder, etc.

Indigenous technology can be used to increase economy and empowered local people. Local technology constitute important source of revenue generation. It provides employment and stimulate community interactions and economic development through sustainable use of local resources in trade and others (Ibeanu and Emeka, 2014). Documentation of IKS would promote local initiatives and innovations for modern societies to advance their potentials using modern technology for rapid development and sustainability of global economy. In this sense, IKS should be exploited for the advancement of modern world peace, security and development.

Challenges of IKS development in Nigeria.

There are many challenges to the development of IKS in Nigeria. Adeyemo & Adebayo (2017) noted that at the levels of the traditional societies, there has been hardly any effort at comprehensive documentation of medicinal knowledge and that in rare cases where bare documentation exists, it is in the local dialect of the

local people. Consequently, to access and use such document is difficult by non-dialectic indigenes. Documentation of IK should be in diverse languages and in multimedia devices to preserve and allow quick access and application of such cultural facets of life.

There is also the problem of missed trust among community members. Most families are identified with certain traditional secret or spiritual knowledge and sharing such deep knowledge with uninitiated family members or outside people is difficult. Sometimes, mistrust exist even among family members who may want to outsmart other members and share such traditional family secrets for big financial gains. This situation has caused serious dichotomy among family members to the point of killing one another. Notable indigenous knowledge resident with certain family members have been lost in this way and redeeming such knowledge has never been possible.

UNESCO (2017) vividly identified lack of scientific verification and statistical analyses for traditional meteorological predictions. Similarly, many people believed that the traditional knowledge system is crude and unrefined to be used for anything good. Again, indigenous content are available in conversations, images, sounds, artefacts, songs, painting and drawings, superstitions beliefs, religion, poems, etc. and codifying them using emerging ICT tools into print and digital formats require special personnel vast in codifying and translating IKS which at present are not yet so available in the country. Makinde & Shorunke (2013) asserted that Nigerian IKS need to be codified into print and e-formats for widely access. The author further lamented efforts at documentation and communication as only centered on the positive practices of the cultural values.

Correspondingly, Akinde (2008) posited that IK need creative, technical and skilled personnel to transform local ideas, artifacts, laws, customs, language, human institution, technology, food and sports, etc. to allow other people share the information about their cultural practices and heritage. Regrettably, such personnel are lacking. The present day school graduates are not taught IK in schools to be able to undertake that task. Even the three largest ethnic languages that were supposed to be used for instruction at the early school age in Nigeria: Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa, have been replaced with English at that basic level of education and Nigerian elites are very comfortable with this development.

In another view, Twinoburyo (2019) asserted that IKS is constantly changing in context because of mobility of people from one community to another who try to learn and use the knowledge resulting in segmentary and fragmentation of originality. It is difficult to construct and distribute IK without fragmentation as it is orally transmitted through everyday life engagements. It involves lot of imitation and demonstration and writing it down changes some of fundamental properties. The oral nature hinders the organization and development into theoretical knowledge. Linguistic departments in Nigerian universities that should be in the forefront of propagating the study and development of IKS are financially constrained due to underfunding, deficiency of technical personnel, deteriorating language laboratory facilities, etc. These frustrating and discouraging huddles are serious enough to hamper such intensive project.

The Role of the Library

The library has a greater role to play in the collection, the documentation, preservation and dissemination of knowledge including the IKS. First, it must be stated that documentation is an easy means to share, preserve and access IKS. Librarians as information specialists are better trained and positioned to propagate the documentation of IKS using appropriate strategic campaign mechanism such as library week, school visitations, conferences, workshops and seminars to call for and to formulate strategies and sustainable apparatus to organize, collect, analyze and document IK from the indigenous sources for documentation and preservation using collaborative interactions with the indigenous knowledge bearers still alive in most local communities.

The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), etc. can also come up with special assistance to libraries in the task of identifying, collecting and managing IKS from the local community people with appropriate financial support and logistic provisions. In this digital era, they should assist librarians to go beyond mere management of already published documents to recording, organizing and preserving IKS for all time access and use. Lor (2004) called on libraries to make available as a role, documented IKS. At present, some IKS are believed to be documented in many traditional institutions such as king palaces or chiefs, cultural centers, etc. As custodian of information resources, the librarians should be able to harness these artefacts and documents through

sustainable collaboration with these traditional institutions and collect them for digitization for virtual access but taking cognizance of the rights of the indigenous owners to copyright laws and the self-determination declared by UNESCO during the International Indigenous People Summit on Sustainable Development held in 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Many libraries should be upgraded to operate as bibliographic IKS centers through extensive collection of the resources and provide prompt and precise access link to the resources virtually. Indigenous knowledge resources fall under library collections that should be built and maintained like other library information materials. There should be new technology information support services for IK to allow global access and use of the collections. Through this method, Nigerian libraries would be able to provide closer cooperation with libraries of various kinds across the world in sharing and exchange of IK resources. Furthermore, such links would promote competitive, innovative and committed protection of the interest of the users of IK resources without compromising its quality standards.

Adeyomo & Adebayo (2017) declared that oral and other indigenous practices can be acquired from the custodians and repackage for preservation and use. Similarly, Anyiri, Oghenovo, & Nwabueze (2010), Mahwasane (2017) citing Onyemaizu (2015) identified other support ways for libraries to document IKS to include:

- i. Documentation of the stories into audio tapes or video recordings
- ii. Collection of the IK practices from communities and publishing them into books or journals
- iii. As way of preservation, converting into artefacts materials that cannot be documented
- iv. Adeyomo and Adebayo (2017) and Mahwasane (2017) noted that through current awareness services, libraries can by way of mass education, community youngsters can be taught the IK of their of locality.

The librarians can also come up with organize support competition programs on IK to showcase indigenous technology products from various communities such as traditional artier outfit competitions, IK dramas, songs, music and dance, wrestling, etc. with various awards for the performers to encourage them on IKS. During such events, the librarians can make documentation of the events for preservation and

dissemination to the information users. Such community documentaries can also be showcase on the Internet platforms as the nation's cultural heritage for global acknowledgement and reference use. By this, the library would be publicizing the worth, impact and significance of Nigerian IKS to the world.

IK need to be codified into digital and print-formats for global accessibility and use. Although the World Bank (2006) reported that various projects are in place to document and disseminate IK for global online access, librarians as information experts should try to identify the progresses for such project and facilitate their prompt completion. This would help to bridge the gap of long years of supremacy and downgrading of Nigerian IKS by the western knowledge. The Nigerian libraries should be in the forefront of propagating her country's IKS as scope of knowledge that must be appreciated and use in the global knowledge and information domain.

Conclusion

This paper has established that the Nigerian IKS is a cultural talent that must be sustain through proper documentation as a national heritage. Although many of the Nigerian indigenous knowledge have been identified and appreciated across the globe, there is still more to be done using the library as catalyst. The librarians need appropriate support system to enhance for collection and documentation of this valuable cultural heritage for global use. It has been established that digital technology and proper funding is required to leverage the relevance of IKS to the nations' developmental process and to achieve this, the library should be the center pace for gathering, documenting, preserving and disseminating IKS and be the country's partway to improving sustainable research and development. In this paper, it is clear that knowledge is the key to creating wealth for sustainable growth and developments in all sectors of human endeavor and Nigerian IKS has that capacity.

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