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March 2021

The Role of Federal Varsity Libraries in Collecting and Preserving Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainable Development in South East Nigeria

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Ojobor, Rebecca Chidimma Dr.; Babarinde, Elizabeth Titilope Mrs; Fagbemi, Victoria Olayemi Mrs; and Nwankwo, Evangeline Uchechi Mrs, "The Role of Federal Varsity Libraries in Collecting and Preserving Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainable Development in South East Nigeria" (2021). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 5155.

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Introduction

The interference of modern technologies in contemporary societies is gradually debasing the cultural values of many countries including Nigeria. The more advanced societies grow; the less concern people have for their cultural heritage. Indigenous people of Southeastern Nigeria like people from other parts of the world have paid more attention to modernity and less to their preserved distinctive values and understandings, ingrained in cultural experience, that guide relations between human, and non-human in the past. These overlooked values constitute a system broadly identified as indigenous knowledge, also called traditional knowledge or aboriginal knowledge Bruchac (2014).

Indigenous knowledge (IK) is defined as unrecorded knowledge that exists in the minds of people of a given community which is passed from generation to generation by words of mouth (Ebijuwa, 2015). IFAD (2016) explains that indigenous peoples' knowledge refers to the knowledge and know-how accumulated across generations, tested and adopted through millennia, which guide indigenous societies in their interactions with their surrounding environment. It pertains to practical, locality-specific knowledge and practices of medicine, hunting, fishing, agriculture, conflict resolution, education and environmental conservation developed by indigenous people of a particular community over the years. Considering the need of these knowledge in the society, Ngulube (2013) avers that libraries need to do more to ensure that indigenous knowledge is properly managed and preserved like other documentary materials.

Varsity libraries have been seen as one of the libraries that house varieties of information sources usually known as library collection. Libraries build its collection through a process known as collection development. Collection development is one of the primary functions of the library through which the library meets the diverse information needs of its

users. This is why library is referred to as a life line to be reckon with, in individual and societal development especially in this age and time when there is dire need for knowledge that could induce sustainable development.

Sustainable development is the act of transformation and general uplifting of individual human activities in a given society. According to Nicholas and Perpetual (2015), sustainable development is a general change and improvement in any given society as related to individual progress. Achieving sustainable development is the priority of every nation which could be encouraged with the valuable information sources stored in varsity libraries. With the unique roles of collecting, persevering and disseminating information among members of the society the varsity library is seen as an inevitable tool for development in the society (Okoro, Akidi & Arua 2014).

However, of all the information sources stored in varsity libraries, records on indigenous knowledge are meager or absence in the library. This corresponds with Ngulube and Stilwell (2010) that research libraries have not been particularly active in documenting indigenous knowledge. Consequently, people lack information to understand their cultural values and the natural phenomena surrounding their environment. Ignorance and level of uncertainty about people's environment results to misconceptions and misunderstanding among the people and hence obstruct development. Again, many IK systems are at the risk of extinction because of rapidly changing natural environment and fast pacing economic, political and cultural changes on the global scale and partially because of its oral mode of transmission.

Statement of the Problem

Regardless the roles of indigenous knowledge in various aspect of human life and its ability to induce development in the past; many IK systems are presently at the risk of extinction. The death of IK system is due to improper records of these knowledge in varsity libraries which is attributed to lack of unified collection development policies among librarians

and other information scientist; unwillingness of the custodians to reveal the knowledge owing to unsecured intellectual property right (IPR); and poor environmental condition for proper preservation of IK systems. Consequently, people lack information to understand their cultural values and the natural phenomena surrounding their environment. Ignorance and level of uncertainty about people's environment resulted to misconceptions and misunderstanding among the people and hence dither development. In view of the foregoing, what are the efforts being made by librarians to ensure longevity of this irrecoverable knowledge after their custodians? This addresses the focus of the study.

Purpose of the Study

Generally, the study investigates the role of varsity library in collecting and preserving indigenous knowledge for sustainable development in South East Nigeria with specific reference to:

1. determine the extent to which federal varsity libraries in southeastern Nigeria preserved indigenous knowledge across disciplines
2. identify the format used in preserving indigenous knowledge in varsity libraries under study
3. ascertain the contributions of indigenous knowledge on sustainable development
4. find out the challenges encountered by varsity librarians in the study area in collecting and preserving indigenous knowledge

Literature Review

Varsity library is an intellectual resource centre of its parent institution which play a supportive role of enhancing knowledge frontier of its users. Users of the varsity libraries sort information stored in different forms and media which also include those in indigenous form (Mole, Ekwelem and Dim, 2018). In view of this, Okorafor (2010) suggests that the new role of varsity libraries is in the documentation, storage and dissemination of indigenous knowledge

needed by their host communities, as it could be vital for sustainable development. As a part of its function, Ramanan (2015) advocates that the varsity libraries are mandated to house indigenous knowledge collections that depict what is done around the community where they are situated.

Indigenous knowledge is regarded as local knowledge of a given community, things that are known through information that is being passed from one generation to another to sustain the community and the culture of the people. This corresponds with Anyira, Onoriode, and Nwabueze (2010) that indigenous knowledge is knowledge accumulated by people living in a particular community over the years. Indigenous knowledge is store in people's memories and is expressed in stories, songs, folk tales, proverbs dances, myths, cultural values, beliefs rituals, community laws, local language and taxonomy, agricultural practices, equipment, materials, plant species and animal breeds (Nakata and Langton, 2005). Most of these indigenous knowledge are non-current records; but have values that are useful for sustainable development in our contemporary society.

In relating to this, Sultana, Muhammad and Zakaria (2018) purported that sustainable development is possible only if the creative capacities of the society are engaged in the development process, and for that to occur, development action must be rooted in the culture of the country concerned. Sustainable development according to European Union (2016) is a type of development that take cognizance of future needs even in its bid to meet the needs of the present. It is the transformation and general uplifting of a society through its members. Similarly, Abata-Ebire,, Adebowale, and Ojokuku (2018) advocate that sustainable development covers a wide range of interrelated issues in the areas of environmental, economic, social, and political, all within the limits of the world's natural resources to ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by the year 2030. In this wise, Indigenous

knowledge plays a significant role in the society because it has the capacity to empower the community, and promote sustainable development

Remarkable contributions of indigenous knowledge on sustainable development have been recorded in food production, family life, healthcare and natural resource management. It serves to empower local communities by appreciating native knowledge which support notions of the Africa renaissance. To buttress this, Abioye, Zaid, and Egberongbe, (2014) pointed out that farmers adopt a wide range of indigenous agricultural practices on methods of: controlling pests and diseases, maintaining soil fertility, controlling weeds, harvesting, storage, soil preparation and planting materials, based on generations of experience, informal experiments and intimate understanding of their environments. The inherent enthusiasm of indigenous peoples' knowledge systems lies at the heart of their ability to adjust and modify their actions in response to environmental change. This coincides with the report of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (2020) that the development of indigenous knowledge is from experience gained over centuries and adapted to the local culture and environment and this have been proven to enhance and promote biodiversity at the local level and aid in maintaining healthy ecosystems. Furthermore, Mposhi, Manyeruke and Hamauswa (2013) contributed that the knowledge of indigenous people on the use of herbs and plants extracted through an ancestral procedure, could provide cheaper and more affordable solutions to most of the human healthcare problems currently faced in Southeastern Nigeria and Africa at large. This is held by Gorjestani (2004) that the rates of maternal mortality at childbirth were reduced significantly when traditional institutions (including the traditional birth attendant) were used in combination with modern communications. Considering the roles of indigenous knowledge in various aspects of human life, Makinde and Shorunke (2013) believe that placing value on such knowledge could strengthen cultural identity and enhanced using the knowledge to achieve social and developmental goals which will definitely lead to

sustainable development in our societies and countries at large. In this regards Das Gupta (2011) maintained that attaching traditional values in a society builds up the core of social system and simultaneously assures sustainability among human society and ecology.

Incredibly, the innumerable worth of Indigenous knowledge on humans in the past could not preclude its extinction in the contemporary society. Reasons attributed to the death of IK especially in this era include the advancement of information communication technology which affected every aspect of human life including our culture. Our indigenous knowledge system is fast eroding due to, commercialization, globalization and modernization which has led to the breakdown of the traditional family structure and function. Abioye and Oluwaniyi (2017) gave the view that many IK systems are at the risk of extinction because they are being passed from generation to generation through the oral process which is fraught with a lot of problems and has resulted in the loss of vital components of the indigenous knowledge. The new era of information and communication technology obstructs socialization process, induced human displacements and lead to lack of interest in IK practitioner. lack of efficient codification of IK among parents and their young ones is a great risk to our local skills. This relates with Ossai (2010) that among the challenges facing indigenous knowledge in our country is its difficulty in codification. Today most parents do not allow their children to communicate with their indigenous language. Such attitude leads to decline and fall of IK as children of such homes hardly cherish the norms and values of their land. It is also observed that dearth of fund in libraries and lack of unified collection development policy among library professionals, ethnographers, anthropologists, botanists, zoologists, oral historians and other related professionals constitute problems in collecting, organizing, documenting and disseminating IK. Besides, inability to protect the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) of IK practitioners is among the prevailing factors ravaging IK in most societies. Insecurity in IPR leads to hoarding and unwillingness to reveal the actual skills thereby faking and devaluing the

potentials of IK practices. It is a real fact that indigenous peoples have the right to own and control their cultural and intellectual property pertaining to their sciences, technologies, seeds, medicines, knowledge of vegetation and wildlife, oral traditions, designs, art and performances. To uphold this, the Economic Commission for Africa recommends that oral tradition and indigenous knowledge in African communities should be exploited in all their forms of expression, giving cognizance to the protection of intellectual property rights. (United Nations (n.d). Again, due to the tacit nature of IK system; its mode of transmission constitutes a problem. The influence of cultural diversity among librarians, ethnographers and anthropologists that records and document IK leads to linguistic variation which resulted to loss of vital components of IK system since there is no single approach for its recording. In addition, librarians' unwillingness to collect IK directly from the local practitioners is a contributing factor to the disappearance of IK system in this era. Although librarians are trained information scientists which places them in a better position to determine the right skill or knowledge to collect from the local people yet, they have not been at the forefront in terms of going to the field in search for information. In this view, Okore (2009) maintained that the knowledge age workers need to be able to locate, assess and represent new information quickly and communicate such to others. Another threat to the survival of IK system is environmental change. Environmental changes relative to temperature and humidity adversely affect the life span of most CDs and DVDs used for storing IK. A significant abrupt temperature change will cause greater stress than a gradual change. Therefore, leaving the disc in its packaging will allow gradual acclimation to a changed environment. Akin to this are moisture and dust. CD-Rom, tape, film slide and other facilities used for storing indigenous knowledge are vulnerable to moisture and dust. When any of these facilities is exposed to moisture for a long time, it becomes too cold and absorbed water that affects its layers. Similarly, exposure of these facilities to dust could lead to malfunctioning. Marking and labeling is also detrimental to some of the

facilities used in storing IK. Although marking and labeling CDs or DVDs is indispensable for easy identification and organization yet, the inks in makers contain chemical composition formed from pigments or dyes that can cause damage to the plates.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine the role of federal varsity libraries in collecting and persevering IK for sustainable development in southeastern Nigeria. It is a census study of 166 target population which contains all the librarians in the five federal varsity libraries in the study area; made of 78 from Nnamdi Azikiwe Library UNN; 36 from Festus Aghabo Nwako Library NAU; 20 from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike (MOUUAU) Library; 21 from Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) library; and 11 from Federal University Ndifun-Alike Ikwo (FUNAI) library Ebonyi. Questionnaire and interview were designed to elicit information from the respondents. Out of one hundred and sixty-six (166) copies of the questionnaire administered to the respondents, one hundred and fifty-two (152) copies were well filled and returned in a useable form; indicating a return rate of 91.6%. The returned instruments were collated and analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Responses of the interview were equally recorded and use for the study.

Presentation and Data Analysis

Table 1: Extent to which Library Preserved Indigenous Knowledge Across Disciplines

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	MEAN	SD	Decision
1.	IK on Agriculture	33	80	9	30	2.76	1.01	HE
2.	IK on traditional medicine	21	18	96	17	2.28	0.84	LE
3.	IK on Ecosystem	15	47	26	64	2.09	1.06	LE
4.	IK on traditional attire	16	30	46	60	2.01	1.01	LE
5.	IK on marketing and banking system	34	14	21	83	1.99	1.24	LE
6.	IK on conflict resolution	8	3	104	37	1.88	0.68	LE
7.	IK on entertainment	87	9	17	39	2.95	1.31	HE
8.	IK on crafts	6	60	77	9	2.41	0.67	LE
9.	IK on traditional marriage system	13	18	23	98	1.64	0.99	LE

Key: VHE: Very High Extent; HE: High Extent; LE: Low Extent; VLE: Very Low Extent

Table 1 above displays the extent to which the varsity libraries under study preserved indigenous knowledge across disciplines. The table reveals that in exception of agriculture and entertainment the concerned libraries preserved indigenous knowledge on crafts, traditional medicine, ecosystem and other outlined disciplines to a low extent.

Table 2: Format in which Indigenous Knowledge are Preserved in Library:

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	SD	Decision
10.	print	86	23	29	14	3.19	1.05	A
11.	Documentary	6	31	46	69	1.83	0.89	D
12.	Pictures	43	95	10	4	3.16	0.66	A
13.	Model	37	104	7	4	3.14	0.61	A
14.	Artifacts	32	24	59	37	2.34	1.07	D
15.	Sculpture	23	30	64	35	2.27	0.98	D
16.	CD-Rom	89	13	15	35	3.03	1.27	A
17.	Video	15	34	80	23	2.27	0.84	D

Key: SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree;

The data display in table 2 above reveals information on the format in which IK systems are preserved in the varsity libraries under study. The table shows that most of the available records on indigenous knowledge are preserved in print, pictures, models and CD-Rom format. This is indicated by the high mean scores of the items above the criterion mean (2.5) as shown on the table. However, the low mean scores on video, sculpture, artifacts and documentary shows that they are not frequently use in preserving IK in the libraries under study.

Table 3: Contributions of Indigenous Knowledge on Sustainable Development

S/N	Items	SA	A	SD	D	MEAN	SD	Decision
18.	Promotion and development of economy	108	30	6	8	3.57	0.8	SA
19.	promotion of cultural values and practices	70	33	17	32	2.93	1.19	A
20.	improved health care through traditional medicine	75	32	25	20	3.07	1.09	A
21.	indigenous knowledge on marriage system can help in reducing the rate of divorce in the society	94	33	16	9	3.39	0.9	A
22.	IK on morals and norms helps to curb societal decadent especially among youth	95	28	28	1	3.43	0.81	A

23.	Indigenous knowledge practices improve in food production	96	32	17	7	3.43	0.87	A
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Key: SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree;

Data presented on table 3 divulges the contribution of IK on sustainable development. It is observed that IK has the potential to promote and develop our economy ($\bar{X} = 3.57$), improves food production ($\bar{X} = 3.43$), improve health care ($\bar{X} = 3.07$), reduce the rate of divorce in the society ($\bar{X} = 3.39$), curb societal decadents ($\bar{X} = 3.43$) and promote cultural values and practices ($\bar{X} = 2.93$).

Table 4: Challenges encountered by librarians in collecting and preserving indigenous knowledge

S/N	Items	SA	A	SD	D	Mean	SD	Decision
24.	Lack of unified collection development policy	72	41	32	7	3.17	0.92	A
25.	Unsecured intellectual property right	89	50	13	0	3.5	0.65	SD
26.	lack of standard in recording and documentation of IK	56	47	20	29	2.86	1.12	A
27.	Poor infrastructure and dearth of human resources	10	19	33	90	1.66	0.93	D
28.	Eroding of indigenous language by parents	5	105	15	27	2.58	0.82	A
29.	Moisture	104	19	26	3	3.47	0.85	A
30.	Insufficient fund	84	31	15	22	3.16	1.1	A
31.	Environmental conditions (temperature and humidity)	76	23	11	42	2.88	1.29	A
32.	Labeling and marking of CDs and DVDs	44	42	13	53	2.51	1.24	A
33.	Language interference	29	79	24	20	2.77	0.91	A
34.	Inability to duplicate the original copies of IK documentation	30	18	37	67	2.07	1.16	SD
35.	Librarians Lack of interest in going to the field	31	81	16	24	2.78	0.95	A

Key: SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

Table 4 discloses the challenges encountered by librarians in collecting and preserving IK.

Information on the table shows that 10 out of the 12 items on the table are constraints librarians come across in collecting and preserving IK. Out of the 10 constraints, unsecured intellectual property right has the highest mean score of ($\bar{X} = 3.5$), followed by moisture ($\bar{X} = 3.47$), eroding of indigenous language by parents ($\bar{X} = 3.17$) and environmental condition ($\bar{X} = 3.16$). however, the respondents indicated that poor infrastructure and dearth of human resources ($\bar{X} = 1.66$) and

inability to duplicate the original copies of Ik documentation ($\bar{X}=1.16$) are not major challenges to collection and preservation of IK systems in the library.

Discussion of the Findings

Extent to which Library Preserved Indigenous Knowledge Across Disciplines

The findings of the study reveal that there is low extent of records on IK in the libraries under study excluding agriculture and entertainment where the respondents indicated a high mean response of 2.76 and 2.95 respectively. The finding corresponds with Ngulube and Stilwell (2010) that research libraries have not been particularly active in documenting sufficient indigenous knowledge across all disciplines. The interviews conducted with some librarians in the varsity libraries under study also showed that indigenous materials on agriculture and entertainment were given much attention as agriculture becomes the major source of food production in the economy; and that people need to be enlightened on various stress management strategies through the local entertainment measures. However, the report of the interview shows that due to lack of awareness users are not making adequate use of the available indigenous knowledge.

Format in which Indigenous Knowledge is Preserved in Library

The findings of this study reveals that most records on indigenous knowledge are preserved in print, pictures, models and CD-Rom format. The findings correspond with (Abioye, Zaid and Egberongbe (2014) that indigenous knowledge can be preserve in computer, CD, DVD, recording, video and leaflets. The finding is also in line with Mankinde and Shorunke (2013) that indigenous knowledge of needs to be codified into print and electronic formats for both audio and video. Preservation of indigenous knowledge in these forms will make it widely accessible through the global information infrastructure.

Contributions of Indigenous Knowledge on Sustainable Development:

The findings of the study reveal positive response of the respondents on all the items on the table. This indicate the potentials of IK to enhance sustainable development in the society. This finding corresponds with Abioye, Zaid, and Egberongbe, (2011) that farmers adopt a wide range of indigenous agricultural practices to improve food production in the society. It also coincides with the report of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (2020) that the development of indigenous knowledge is from experience gained over centuries and adapted to the local culture and environment. Furthermore, the finding advocates with Mposhi, Manyeruke and Hamauswa (2013) that knowledge of indigenous people on the use of herbs and plants extracted through an ancestral procedure, could provide cheaper and more affordable solutions to most of the human healthcare problems.

Challenges Encountered by librarians in Collecting and Preserving Indigenous Knowledge

In relation to the respondents' responses, the major challenges encountered by librarians in collection and preservation of IK in federal varsity libraries in Southeastern Nigeria are insufficient fund, Lack of unified collection development policy, unsecured Intellectual Property Right (IPR), moisture, eroding of indigenous language by parents, and poor environmental condition. The findings agree with Ossai (2010) that difficulty in codifying our indigenous knowledge is a major contribution to its extinction. The finding is also in line with Abioye and Oluwaniyi (2017) who allege that many IK systems are at the risk of extinction because they are being passed from generation to generation through the oral process which is fraught with a lot of problems and has resulted in the loss of vital components of the indigenous knowledge. The new era of information and communication technology obstructs socialization process, induced human displacements and lead to lack of interest in IK practitioner.

The findings of the study also show that poor infrastructure and dearth of human resources and inability to duplicate the original copies of IK documentation are not major

challenges to collection and preservation of indigenous knowledge agrees with Abioye and Oluwaniyi opcit that poor infrastructure and dearth of human resources is not a challenge to collection and preservation of indigenous knowledge.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that indigenous knowledge is essential for sustainable development in all disciplines; but library's inability to collect and preserves these local knowledge impedes its potentials to be known among people of this era hence its neglect. Consequently, neglect of the valuable heritage set back sustainable development in the society. Therefore, to preclude further set back on sustainable development, libraries need to review their collection development policy to give more precedence on collection and preservation of indigenous knowledge. There is also need to introduce measures to protect the individual property right of the custodians of indigenous knowledge and ensure that they share equitably the benefits derived from the uses of their local knowledge; Librarians should also be encouraged to see field work as part of their profession likewise, to collaborate with the indigenous knowledge practitioner to suppress the problem of language interference to ensure proper recording and documentation. Besides, for proper preservation of indigenous knowledge libraries should ensure that there is conducive environment.

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