

Public Libraries as Pivotal Agents in Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainable Development

Osagie, Faith O.¹; Fagbemi, Victoria Y.²; Agubata, Nnamdi M.³, & Dogara, Peter D.⁴

Department of Library and Information Science, University of Nigeria Nsukka^{1,2,3}

Department of Library and Information Science, Kaduna State College of Education, Kaduna⁴

Osagiefaith1@gmail.com¹; victoria.fagbemi@unn.edu.ng²; nnamdi.agubata@unn.edu.ng³; dogzyp@yahoo.com⁴

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights public libraries as pivotal agents in preservation of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development. Public libraries play vital roles in preservation of indigenous knowledge. Also, librarians that work within these libraries serve as important agents in ensuring that indigenous knowledge in the society especially Nigeria are preserved sustainably. Thus, libraries are providing indigenous materials and training to the community to help in documenting indigenous knowledge, by ensuring that the intellectual property rights of indigenous communities are protected in a sustainable way. The study revealed some challenges to include: inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funds and unwillingness to disclose culture information. The paper recommends that there is need for librarians to possess proactive attitudes, strong collaborative partnership with indigenous communities and support from government to preserve indigenous knowledge.

Keywords: *Indigenous Knowledge, Public Libraries, Preservation, Sustainable Development*

Introduction

A library is a place where individuals access information and ideas. Libraries are not to be regarded just as a place for reading. According to Rubin (2010) they exist in many countries across the world and are often considered an essential part of having an educated and literate population. Information is an important resource which is essential for the progress of any individual and that of a nation, which various libraries especially the public libraries provide.

According to Rubin (2010) public library is a library that is accessible by the general public and is usually funded from public sources, such as taxes. It is operated by librarians and library paraprofessionals, who are also civil servants. There are five fundamental characteristics shared by public libraries: they are generally supported by

taxes (usually local, though any level of government can and may contribute); they are governed by a board to serve the public interest; they are open to all, and every community member can access the collection; they are entirely voluntary in that no one is ever forced to use the services provided; and they provide basic services without charge.

The public library is established to provide materials, which communicate experience and ideas from one person to another and make them easily and freely available to all people. The public library is a local center of information that makes all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. It is established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organizations. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of

imagination through a range of resources and services.

Nwokocha (2004) defines Public Library as being established to serve the generality of the residents of the community or town where it is located. Compared to other Libraries it has about the most heterogeneous clientele as there is no restriction as to who can use it. Nwokocha (2004) further argued that the Public Library must be readily accessible and its door open for free and equal use by all members of the community regardless of race, colour, nationality, age, sex, religion, status, or education, therefore public library is opened to all kind of users in the society. Public Library is a learning center where people can take part in learning activities, discuss and share knowledge and information. Public library provide various services such reference services, research assistant, children programs, adult learning services, digital and online service, book lending services etc. The main function of public library in Nigeria is the provision of information contained in books, newspapers, magazines, journals, artifacts, images, painting and audio-visual to users according to their needs. Public library also helps in preserving and providing access to various indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous knowledge (IK) has been described in various ways: cultural knowledge, environmental knowledge, community knowledge, local knowledge, traditional knowledge, farmer's or pastoralist's knowledge, folk knowledge, traditional wisdom, traditional science, people's knowledge, indigenous traditional knowledge, indigenous technical knowledge, traditional environmental knowledge, rural knowledge, traditional ecological knowledge and also as a subset of traditional knowledge (Jain, 2008; UNEP, 2008). Averweg & Greyling (2010) defined Indigenous Knowledge as the "knowledge that an indigenous (local) community accumulates over time". This

description of indigenous knowledge encompasses all forms of local knowledge acquired experientially – arts, languages, understanding, practices, technologies and beliefs – that enable a community to achieve stable livelihoods in its geographical residence. Thus, indigenous knowledge is culture-specific, dynamic, originates from age-old beliefs, traditions, experiences and observations. It is non-formal, orally transmitted and usually not documented. Indigenous knowledge falls under tacit knowledge, which is personal Knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is now considered to be cultural knowledge in its broadest sense, including all of the social, political, economic and spiritual aspects of a local way of life. Ossai (2010) further avers that Indigenous knowledge is essentially tacit knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is based on resource management knowledge and the tools; techniques, practices for pastoralism; agriculture, agro-forestry, water management and the gathering of food; classification system of plants, animals, soils, water, weather; empirical knowledge about Flora, fauna and inanimate resources and their uses; worldview or way the local group perceives its relationship to the natural world. (Emery,1996; Fagbemi, 2019).

Since Indigenous knowledge is personal in nature, it is hard to put into words and difficult to codify and transfer but expressed through action. For the purpose of this paper, indigenous knowledge is defined, as local knowledge based on a given culture of a community that is transmitted through oral means by initiation and demonstration in various cultural heritage by the custodians. According to Nakata and Langton (2005), indigenous knowledge refers to the knowledge, innovation, and practices of indigenous and local communities around the world, developed from experience over centuries, and adapted to the local culture and environment, transmitted orally from generation to generation. Indigenous knowledge is collectively owned and exists as stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, cultural

values, norms, beliefs, rituals, local languages, and agricultural practices, including the development of plant species and animal breeds (Nakata & Langton, 2005).

There is a growing appreciation of the value of indigenous knowledge. It has become valuable not only to those who depend on it in their daily lives, but to modern industry and agriculture as well. Warren (1991) notes that IK has made a tremendous contribution to crop production by poor farmers. Okuneye and Ayinde (2004) add that small scale resource farmers have good reasons for sticking with their local knowledge and farming practices, because modern technologies can only be successful and sustainable if indigenous knowledge is taken into consideration. Many libraries recognize indigenous knowledge as an important source of developmental information. Nakata and Langton (2005) observe that the library and information profession has a lot to learn if they are to meet the information needs of indigenous people and appropriately manage indigenous knowledge.

Importance of Indigenous Knowledge

There are various reasons why it is important for researchers to consider indigenous knowledge when carrying out research projects. First and foremost, incorporating indigenous knowledge into research projects can contribute to local empowerment and development, increasing self-sufficiency and strengthening self-determination (Thrupp, 1989). Utilizing indigenous knowledge in research projects and management plans gives it legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of both local people and outside scientists, increasing cultural pride and thus motivation to solve local problems with local ingenuity and resources. Local capacity-building is a crucial aspect of sustainable development, and researchers and development specialists should design approaches which support and

strengthen appropriate indigenous knowledge and institutions.

Second, indigenous people can provide valuable input about the local environment and how to effectively manage its natural resources. Outside interest in indigenous knowledge systems has been fueled by the recent worldwide ecological crisis and the realization that its causes lie partly in the over exploitation of natural resources based on inappropriate attitudes and technologies. Scientists now recognize that indigenous people have managed the environments in which they have lived for generations, often without significantly damaging local ecologies (Emery, 1996). Many feel that indigenous knowledge can thus provide a powerful basis from which alternative ways of managing resources can be developed. Indigenous knowledge technologies and know-how have an advantage over introduced forms in that they rely on locally available skills and materials and are thus often more cost-effective than introducing exotic technologies from outside sources (IIRR,1996a). Also, local people are familiar with them and so do not need any specialized training.

The following are some of the features of indigenous knowledge which have relevance to conservation and sustainable development:

Locally appropriate: Indigenous knowledge represents a way of life that has evolved with the local environment, so it is specifically adapted to the requirements of local conditions.

Restraint in resource exploitation: Production is for subsistence needs only; only what is needed for immediate survival is taken from the environment

Diversified production systems: There is no over exploitation of a single resource; risk is often spread out by utilizing a number of subsistence strategies.

Respect for nature: A 'conservation ethic' often exists. The land is considered sacred,

humans are dependent on nature for survival, and all species are interconnected.

Flexible: Indigenous knowledge is able to adapt to new conditions and incorporate outside knowledge.

Social responsibility: There are strong family and community ties, and with them feelings of obligation and responsibility to preserve the land for future generations. (Dewalt, 1994).

The Role of Public Library in the Preserving Indigenous Knowledge

Libraries are performing various activities to preserve traditional knowledge (indigenous knowledge) e.g. documentation of traditional knowledge, capturing or recording of traditional knowledge, microfilming of traditional knowledge, digitization of traditional knowledge and creating digital repositories to enhance the accessibility of traditional knowledge. We have various public libraries that are engaged in preservation of indigenous knowledge; however some challenges are encountered in doing this. These include, lack of recorded traditional knowledge, copyright issues, cost of digitization and lack of trained manpower.

Increasingly, communities and organizations around the world are realizing the value and significance of indigenous knowledge and the importance of preserving it for future generations. Dangi (2019) stated that capturing and preservation of indigenous knowledge is being used to revitalise endangered cultures, improve the economic independence and sustainable development of indigenous communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Library

Public Libraries are libraries open to children, teenagers, young adults, adults and aged, literate and illiterate, physically challenged and able bodied. The role of the public library is primarily to make literacy a joy rather than a task. The communities where these libraries are situated are engaged extensively, they see the library as part of them, which makes it important. Infact, it is often referred to as the “poor man’s university” because it is stocked with all kinds of materials to satisfy the information needs of citizens and servicing the reading materials needs for formal and informal education Gani, Allahmagani & Kasa, (2019).

Nwokocha (2004) defines Public Library as being established to serve the generality of the residents of the community or town where it is located. Compared to other Libraries it has about the most heterogeneous clientele as there is no restriction as to who can use it. Nwokocha (2004) went further to argue that the Public Library must be really accessible and its door open for free and equal use by all members of the community regardless of race, colour, nationality, age, sex, religion, status, or education, therefore public library is opened to all kind of users in the society. Public Library is a learning center where people can take part in learning activities, discuss and share knowledge and information. Public library provide various services such as reference services, research assistance, children programs, adult learning services, digital and online services, book lending services etc. The main function of public Library in Nigeria is the provision of information contained in books, newspapers, magazines, journals, artifacts’, images, painting and audio-visual to users according to their needs. Public library

also helps in preserving and providing access to the various indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge (IK) can be broadly defined as the knowledge that an indigenous (local) community accumulates over generations living in a particular environment. It is the unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around the specific conditions of people indigenous to a particular geographical area (Grenier, 2008).

According to Obomsawin (2002), it represents the accumulated experience, wisdom and know-how unique to a given culture, society, and for community. Local people, including farmers, herbalists, women, rural artisans and goat and cattle rearers are the custodians of indigenous knowledge system (IK). As they have extended histories of interaction with the natural environment, indigenous knowledge is not like the international knowledge system which is generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. Mole and Dim (2009) stated that indigenous knowledge is unwritten knowledge that is unique to a given culture and society. Nyana (2009) do not find the restrictions of this concept and expanded its scope. He argued that indigenous knowledge is not confined to tribal groups or the original inhabitants of the area. He asserts that indigenous knowledge is not tied to the rural people rather any community possessing indigenous knowledge-rural or urban, settled or nomadic, original inhabitants and migrants. Indigenous knowledge is found in people's memories and activities and that is why when an elder dies, it is as if a library had been burnt down." and that is why it is tacit in nature (Yemi, 2019).

The research of Aderibigbe (2015) can be said to be the most recent work on Yorùbá indigenous knowledge. She

examined the erosion of Yorùbá Indigenous Knowledge System due to the intrusion of foreign technologies and ideologies and how playwrights have come to its rescue. With the view of conserving and preserving the declining Yorùbá indigenous knowledge, Aderibigbe (2015) is of the view that people's memory about their eroded knowledge needs to be preserve to avoid total lost of indigenous knowledge.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services based upon which the economy and society depend. Sustainable development or sustainability is a concept which global development focuses attention on now as a goal that must be achieved and which has to be adapted into the practical dimensions of the real world to make it operational (Hartmut 1999:1). It, therefore, remains one of the most vibrant topics in development and has become the guiding principle of contemporary socio-economic development globally. In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, sought to address the problem of conflicts between environment and development goals by formulating a definition of sustainable development: Sustainable development is the development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

It is generally accepted that sustainable development calls for a harmony between the three pillars of economic development, social equity and environmental protection. Sustainable development is a visionary development paradigm and, over the past 20 years, governments, businesses, and civil society have accepted sustainable development as a

guiding principle in achieving developmental goals. Sustainable development, as a fluid concept, has attracted scholars from various disciplines to establish their views. (Fagunwa, 2016).

Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge in the Library

It is difficult to define Indigenous knowledge because it varies along with the indigenous people of the world (Stephen, 2008). Common features have been identified, to create a working definition, such as this one provided by UNESCO: Indigenous knowledge refers to a complete body of knowledge, knowhow and practices maintained and developed by people, generally in rural areas, who have extended histories of interaction with the natural environment. These sets of understandings, interpretations and meanings are part of a cultural complex that encompasses language, naming and classification systems, practices for using resources, ritual, and spirituality and worldview. It provides the basis for local level decision-making about many fundamental aspects of day-to-day life. Indigenous communities preserve and transmit knowledge using techniques like oral storytelling and experiential instruction. Battiste and Hendersen (2004) state that Indigenous knowledge systems can only be understood through the methods of a particular community, such as apprenticeships, ceremonies, and practice, and in the environment in which the system originates. Stevens (2008) asserts that the channels for communicating indigenous knowledge have become inaccessible to the indigenous people themselves, especially young people, because of the modern dependence on the written word and loss of facility with indigenous languages. Indigenous communities face a threat to the survival of their languages and cultures. Stevens (2008) states that, while libraries have not traditionally focused on these areas, they can help indigenous communities manage and preserve indigenous knowledge,

by providing resources and expertise in collection, organization, storage, and retrieval. Indigenous knowledge differs greatly from western knowledge, and must be managed in ways that may challenge conventional methods. Okore, et al., (2009) observes that libraries have made progress in the preservation of local culture in paper and digital format, and have promoted the exchange of information. According to IFLA (2008), libraries can help in collecting, preserving, and disseminating indigenous knowledge, publicizing the value, contribution, and importance of indigenous knowledge to both non-indigenous and indigenous people of the community, involving elders and communities in the production of indigenous knowledge. Encouraging the recognition of intellectual property laws to ensure the proper protection and use of indigenous knowledge,

Use of Indigenous Knowledge in Sustainable Development Process

The development actors in recent years have now recognized the value of participatory approaches in decision-making for sustainable development. Indigenous knowledge provides the basis for grassroots decision-making. It is recently found that the indigenous knowledge of ecological zones, natural resources, medicine, agriculture, aquaculture, forest and game management is far more sophisticated than previously assumed (Posey, 1995). Furthermore, this knowledge offers new models for development that are politically, ecologically and socially sound. Therefore, the development activities that work through indigenous knowledge have several important advantages over projects that operate outside them.

Challenges Militating Against Public Libraries in the Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainable Development

There are various challenges facing public libraries in preserving indigenous knowledge. Eluyemi (2002) noted that the problems of preserving indigenous knowledge are lack of recording and documentation of traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge is mostly stored in people's minds and passed on through generation to generation by word of mouth rather than in written form. It is susceptible to change, that is one threat of extermination of traditional knowledge. In this way, traditional knowledge easily faces loss, due to a lack of recording in written and recorded form, thus the knowledge becomes vulnerable to exploitation and unlawful use by people.

Also copyright issues pose challenge to the structure and policy about protection/preservation of indigenous knowledge. Inadequate amount of persons are trained in intellectual property protection of indigenous knowledge (Marisella Ouma, 2017). The difficulty experienced by indigenous people in trying to protect their traditional knowledge under intellectual property rights law stems mainly from its failure to satisfy the requirements for protection under existing intellectual property law.

Other challenges are lack of adequate infrastructure and funds and unwillingness to disclose culture information. Indigenous knowledge is often communicated through family members from the elder generation to the younger. As a result, it disappears because of cultural homogenization and the death of indigenous people. However, library, especially the public library may not have time or resources to find indigenous knowledge in existing collections and to find people to provide

access to it. Many natives view the extraction of their traditional knowledge from its boarder as a form of theft and are reluctant to share the depth and breadth of what they know with outside interests (Nakata & Langton, 2005). The cost of digitizing items varies greatly in different digitization programme, partly because much digitization is carried out by a third commercial party under contract which may make it difficult for the responding library to determine unit costs. Also funding is needed to achieve effective indigenous knowledge documentation and communication services by various library especially public libraries (Nakata & Langton, 2005).

There is lack of trained manpower. Many public libraries have staff who lack who lack training and exposure to modern digitization technologies This coupled with the, the absence of digitization policies..

Recommendations

From the above problems faced by public libraries in the preservation of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development, this paper recommends that librarians should be more proactive, strong collaborative partnership with indigenous communities, support from government. Specifically, government should re-assess and maintain enhanced quality and standard of public libraries. State festivals of arts and culture should be revived, narrated and proper documentation of artifacts made. Librarians or information specialist in public libraries should organize regular workshops and seminars that will serve as educational forum where citizens irrespective of gender, age, profession can listen to information on social, economic, health agriculture or education to enable them to develop mentally and socially which will help in achieving sustainable development goals. Also government should provide funds to enable public libraries collate organise and preserve

indigenous knowledge in various forms and formats

Conclusions

Public library has played a great part in preservation of indigenous knowledge in respect of sustainable development. In Nigeria, public library's participation in the area of education, agricultural activities, tourism, health and commercial activities, collection and preservation of indigenous knowledge are important contributory factors to sustainable development. The role of public library in increasing access to information and knowledge, underpinned by universal literacy, is an essential pillar of sustainable development. The public library plays a pivotal role towards achieving the sustainable development, by ensuring proper collection and preservation of indigenous Knowledge. The library of today should not merely store documents and preserve them; it must also devise means by which the contents of such documents can be rapidly and effectively transmitted for use. As far as the concept of sustainable development is concerned, information has always played a very important part in human development.

Reference

- Bertot, John Carlo; Jaeger, Paul T.; Langa, Lesley A.; McClure, Charles R. (2006). "Public access computing and Internet access in public libraries: The role of public libraries in e-government and emergency situations". *First Monday*. 11 (9). doi:10.5210/fm.v11i9.1392
- Matthew. *Library: An Unquiet History*. New York, N.Y.: Norton, 2004, p. 135.
- Rubin, Richard E. *Foundations of Library and Information Science* (3rd ed). 2010. Neal-Schuman Publishers: New York.
- ICOMOS, International Cultural Tourism Charter. Principles and Guidelines for Managing Tourism at Places of Cultural

and Heritage Significance. ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee. 2002.

- John Feather, *Managing the documentary heritage: Issues from the present and future*. In: (Gorman, G.E. and Sydney J. Shep [eds.]), *Preservation management for libraries, archives and museums*. London: Facet. 2006, pp. 1-18.
- Simon Thurley, *Into the future: Our strategy for 2005-2010*. In: *Conservation Bulletin [English Heritage]*, 2005 (49).
- Blessing Nonye Onyima, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Nigeria.Nonyelin2003@yahoo.com Onyima.blessing@gmail.com 290 others . LIBRARIES AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE
- DANGI, Ram Kumar; SARAF, Sanjiv. *Role of Libraries in Preservation of Traditional Knowledge: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*, [S.l.], v. 6, n. 1, p. 35-42, feb. 2019. ISSN 2241-1925. Available at: <<http://qqml-journal.net/index.php/qqml/article/view/387>>. Date accessed: 22 aug. 2020.
- Gani, E., Allahmagani, K. & Kasa, M. (2019) **ROLES OF LIBRARY IN SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS** Retrived from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334328062_ROLES_OF_LIBRARIY_IN_SUPPORTING_SUSTAINABLE_DEVELOPMENT_GOALS on feb 12 2020
- Indigenous knowledge and sustainable development in the novels of Daniel Fagunwa Master's Thesis, 2016 110 Pages OLUWADAMILARE KOHODE (AUTHOR
- Traditional knowledge: the challenges facing international lawmakers. February 2017 Dr. Marisella Ouma https://www.wipo.int/wipo_magazine/en/2017/01/article_0003.html