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## Communication/Dissemination and Approaches of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) Contents

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### Introduction

Communication in Africa, just like in other parts of the world, may occur without any deliberate attempt by an information sender. Communication takes different forms, such as verbal or non-verbal, oral or written, formal or informal, and intentional or unintentional. They are all interactive and do not exist in isolation from one another. For instance, observers might get much from the way people dress, their physical appearance, and their body language. So, the receiver must decode the incoming information against the backdrop of their culture and match it with existing knowledge. Culture and existing knowledge always affect encoding, decoding, and matching processes, which sometimes introduce noise into the communication channel and result in no two people, with very few exceptions, having the same knowledge about anything. This explains why there are problems in defining and classifying African communication systems.

Indigenous channels are essential conduits of change. ‘Traditional’ does not mean ‘static’. Time and time again, research has shown that most farmers, men and women alike, do not learn about new technologies through the media or extension services, but rather from their friends and neighbours or through their own experiments. Indigenous channels enjoy high credibility because they are familiar and controlled locally. Local audiences are often sceptical of externally controlled mass media, viewing them merely as government propaganda. External channels have a limited range. Television and newspapers are mainly confined to the richer, urban households of the developing world. Schools reach only the young. Even the most common external channels, radio and extension services, fail to contact many people. Indigenous channels, by contrast, have a much wider audience, reaching those who

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do not read or write. They are crucial for exchanging information with people who are out of reach of external channels. Development programs can use indigenous channels both to collect and to disseminate information. 'Keeping an ear to the ground' by consciously tapping into indigenous channels can help project officials understand the local situation and gauge reactions to project initiatives. Projects can make explicit use of these channels, and much progress has been made in this area, especially with Page 97 of 200 folk media such as songs and puppet shows. However, there remains significant potential for work and co-operation with indigenous organisations. Indigenous channels offer opportunities for local participation in development efforts. Indigenous channels allow local people to communicate with one another and with development professionals using familiar forms. Control is key here: professionals are often reluctant to give up control over the communication process in development projects.

## **Definitions and Conceptual Framework**

Any knowledge that is peculiar to a group of people in a community is an indigenous knowledge. It is not documented knowledge. Usually, it is passed down from one generation to the next, which makes it difficult to identify the owner of the knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is commonly found in Africa. Indigenous knowledge can be defined as "A body of knowledge built up by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature" (Johnson, 1992). Generally speaking, such knowledge evolves in the local environment, becoming specifically adapted to the needs of local people and conditions. It is also creative and experimental, constantly incorporating external influences and internal innovations to adapt to new conditions. It is usually a mistake to think of indigenous knowledge as 'old-fashioned,' 'backwards,' 'static,' or 'unchanging. Indigenous people are the original inhabitants of a particular geographic location, who have a culture and belief system distinct from the international system of knowledge (e.g., the Tribal, Native, First, or Aboriginal people of an area). Some feel that such a definition is too narrow because it excludes people who may have lived in an area for a long time but are not the original inhabitants. This has led to the widespread use of the term "local knowledge," a broader concept referring to the knowledge possessed by any group that has long lived off the land in a particular area. Under this approach, it is not necessary to know if the people in question are the original inhabitants of an area; the important thing is to learn how people - aboriginal or non-aboriginal - in a particular area view and interact with their environment, in order that their knowledge can be mobilised for the design of appropriate interventions (Johnson, 1992). Indigenous

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knowledge is the local knowledge that is unique to a culture or society. Other names for it include: 'local knowledge', 'folk knowledge', 'people's knowledge', 'traditional wisdom', or 'traditional science'. This knowledge is passed from generation to generation, usually by word of mouth and cultural rituals. It has been the basis for agriculture, food preparation, health care, education, conservation, and a wide range of other activities that sustain societies in many parts of the world (Nakashima, Prutt & Bridgewater, 2000).

Indigenous people have a broad knowledge of how to live sustainably. However, formal education systems have disrupted the practical, everyday aspects of indigenous knowledge and ways of learning, replacing them with abstract knowledge and academic methods. Today, there is a grave risk that much indigenous knowledge is being lost, along with valuable knowledge about sustainable ways of living. Indigenous knowledge (IK), generally speaking, is the knowledge used by the locals of an area or community to make a living in a particular environment. It could be knowledge of herbs used to heal a particular ailment, or beliefs, innovations, acts, or other forms of cultural experience and expression that belong to the group. Terms used in the field of sustainable development to designate this concept include indigenous technical knowledge, traditional environmental knowledge, rural knowledge, local knowledge, and farmers' or pastoralists' knowledge. Indigenous Knowledge (IK) can also be broadly conceptualised as the knowledge that an indigenous (local) community accumulates over generations of living in a particular environment. This definition encompasses all forms of knowledge, technologies, know-how skills, practices, and beliefs that enable the community to achieve stable livelihoods in their environment. Indigenous, traditional, or local knowledge is knowledge unique to a given culture or society. It is a local know-how and cultural practices.

that belong to a community and are transmitted orally from generation to generation. Indigenous Knowledge (IK): Often refers to the content—the specific "what"—such as traditional agricultural practices, medicinal knowledge, or environmental understanding. It is practical, cumulative, and adaptive.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS): Refers to the "how" and "why"—the systematic, organised structure comprising the social, spiritual, and physical aspects of life. IKS is a holistic, interconnected framework. It works as follows:

- a. Relationship: IK is housed within IKS. As noted by IntechOpen, IKS acts as the mechanism for managing, sustaining, and transmitting IK.

- b. **Dynamic Nature:** Both are dynamic rather than static, evolving with new experiences and external influences while retaining foundational cultural values.

In essence, IKS provides the context, structure, and philosophy (the system), while IK represents the specific, practical knowledge generated by it.

Different scholars identified several categories of Indigenous Knowledge (IK). Below are some of the categories:

Tavana (2002) identified two types of indigenous knowledge: explicit and tacit.

These are discussed further below.

- a. **Explicit Indigenous Knowledge:** Explicit knowledge consists of “facts, rules, relationships, and policies that can be faithfully codified in paper or electronic form and shared without need for discussion” (Wyatt, 2001). Furthermore, Smith (2001) defines explicit knowledge as “academic knowledge or 'know what' that is described in formal language, print or electronic media, often based on established work processes, using a people-to-documents approach”. Explicit indigenous knowledge refers to traditional knowledge that is easily articulated, expressed, communicated, and recorded. According to Tavana (2002), examples of explicit indigenous knowledge include Samoan knowledge of reef fish names, bird breeding times, and ways to use certain plants for medicinal purposes. The nature of explicit knowledge is that it is easy to store, transfer, and communicate with others. As the erosion of explicit IK and indigenous communication increases, the need to transfer, store, and retain this knowledge among indigenous communities is greater now than ever before (Mehta, Alter, Semali, & Maretzki, 2013; Tikai & Kama, 2010).

- b. **Tacit Indigenous Knowledge:** In contrast to explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge refers to the “practical, action-oriented knowledge or 'know-how' based on practice, acquired by personal experience, seldom expressed openly [and] often resembles intuition” (Smith, 2001). Tacit knowledge is often difficult to express in words because it involves doing something without having to think about it, like riding a bicycle. The very nature of tacit knowledge is that it is difficult to extract from the heads of individuals. It is very seldom found in books, manuals, databases, or files because it is derived from mental models, values, beliefs, perceptions, insights, experiences, and assumptions (Smith, 2001). Tacit indigenous knowledge refers to traditional knowledge that cannot be easily expressed or articulated to outsiders

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(Tavana, 2002). Tacit IK is largely based on an individual's emotions, experiences, insights, observations, and perceptions. Examples of tacit indigenous knowledge include Samoan tacit indigenous knowledge, such as the deep respect indigenous people have for their elders, and the process of reaching a unanimous consensus within their society (meeting). Moreover, while IK research originally emphasised indigenous technical knowledge of the environment, it is now accepted that the concept of IK goes beyond this narrow interpretation. IK is now considered cultural knowledge in its broadest sense, encompassing all social, political, economic, and spiritual aspects of a local way of life. Sustainable development researchers, however, have found the following categories of IK.

#### Channels of Indigenous Knowledge Communication/Dissemination and Transfer.

Indigenous communication is essential for many reasons. Indigenous communication has value in its own right. It is a necessary aspect of culture and the means by which it is preserved, passed down, and adapted. However, indigenous communication is being eroded by exogenous systems - the mass media, schools, agricultural extension, bureaucracies - endangering the survival of much valuable information. Exogenous channels have a limited range. Television and newspapers are primarily confined to urban areas in the Third World. Even the most widespread exogenous channels, extension personnel, and radio, fail to reach many rural people. Indigenous channels, by contrast, are ubiquitous. They are needed to convey messages to people who are out of reach of exogenous channels. Indigenous channels are highly credible because they are familiar and locally controlled. Indigenous channels are highly credible.

Local audiences are often sceptical of the externally controlled mass media. Indigenous channels are essential conduits of change. Research has shown the importance of informal, interpersonal contacts in persuading people to adopt, or reject, innovations. Such contacts are often made through indigenous channels. Development programs can use indigenous communication to collect and disseminate information. Outsiders can tap indigenous channels for information on the local situation and for feedback on project initiatives. Many projects rely on indigenous channels to diffuse innovations and development messages. Some have made explicit use of indigenous channels such as folk media and village organisations. There remains much untapped potential in using such approaches. Indigenous channels offer opportunities for local people to participate in development efforts. They allow local people to communicate with one another and with development professionals and decision-makers. Local people can retain control over local media more easily

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than over technology-intensive media. If indigenous communication is ignored, the result might be inappropriate development efforts. Below are some of the channels used to communicate/disseminate IK:

a. Folk media are the indigenous equivalents of exogenous mass media; folklores are used to teach morals, create amusement and laughter, expose the follies of people, and extol their virtues. Folktales are also referred to in literature as oral narratives or oral performances, for example, “Why the Tortoise Has a Broken Shell”; “Odu na Ola”. Folktales, by their nature, involve face-to-face interaction. Both the narrator and his audience are in close contact and in constant interaction. This close contact tends to enhance the source's credibility and makes the story's content feel very real. They include festivals, plays, puppet shows, dance, song, storytelling, and poetry. Among indigenous channels, folk media have been most widely used to support development activities. In Indonesia, India, and other countries, puppetry and other folk media have been used to promote family planning and political messages, often with success.

b. Indigenous organisations include religious groups, village meetings, irrigation associations, mothers' clubs, and loan associations (van den Akker 1987). These organisations orchestrate much of their communication through formal member meetings, messages about activities and obligations, and work activities.

c. Economic relationships and service suppliers such as traders, farm input suppliers, and indigenous specialists such as healers and midwives are essential sources of information for local people. Market traders provide information on prices, varieties, and fertiliser use. Healers explain diseases and treatments. Any society has individuals who are regarded as authorities in their field of specialisation. They are potent sources of indigenous knowledge on that topic.

d. Deliberate instruction: When we are children, our parents, families, and peers teach us how to eat, how to behave, how to cook, plough, and plant. Warren (1964) calls this process "deliberate instruction." It continues during adolescence and adulthood through initiations and other rites of passage, apprenticeship arrangements, and instructions from village elders. Deliberate instruction would seem far more critical for communicating technical information than the occasional folk media performance, village festival, or even mass media and schools. However, deliberate instruction has received very little attention from development specialists.

e. Unstructured channels Indigenous communication occurs in many other settings: Discussions at home and at the marketplace, in the fields and on the road, in the teahouse and chief's house, and wherever else people meet and talk. A significant part is communication among kin and peer groups. This communication is not organised

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or orchestrated; it is spontaneous and informal. Many other forms of indigenous communication exist: African memorised narratives, Balinese land ownership records written on palm leaves, folklore and proverbs, to mention a few. Direct observation may be necessary: a farmer may observe a neighbour's bumper crop and decide that the variety used is good.

f. The Town-Crier: Soola (1999) describes the town-crier as a potent force in information dissemination, as it remains an authoritative voice of the traditional authority. The town-crier is usually an eloquent fellow who understands the community, and wherever he beats his gong, heads turn, and ears twitch. The people recognised that the message must be necessary and urgent to warrant the crier's dispatch. Also, Nwuneli (1983) described the town-crier model, used in many West African and several East and Central African communities, as an all-purpose disseminator of general information. However, the choice of the hardware (drums, gongs, bells) for information dissemination often depends on what has been previously agreed upon by the community. Thus, when a town crier announces, for instance, the death of a traditional chief or an essential member of the community, the response from different village communities to this message will invariably be the same: grief, wailing, shock, sorrow, and mourning, among others.

g. Oral Poetry/ Narrative: In many ways, the artiste controls society with the beauty of his language and voice, the philosophical bent of his utterances, and the overall relevance and aptness of his art to life. In fact, he cites instances where the artist hypnotises and spellbinds his audience. Among the Yoruba tribe of South-Western Nigeria, Ewi is often used to convey information to eulogise achievements, to guide individuals through the murky waters of the world's hazardous terrain, to celebrate the inexorable link between life and death, and to satirise unacceptable behaviours and practices.

h. Festivals: Africans history is never complete without mentioning their festivals. Various festivals and carnivals are celebrated every year. Some coincide with universal celebrations, while others are unique to Africans. Christmas, Easter, New Year, Sallah, Masquerades, New Yam, City Carnivals, and a host of other similar occasions call for outdoor merry-making and always include music and dance, with instrumentalists and dancers exhibiting their dexterity. Marriages, naming ceremonies, burials, and chieftaincy titles are often must-attend events for Africans. Masquerades, the spirits of the forefathers, parade in beautiful costumes to the accompaniment of small instrumental groups. Dancing groups, both old and new, of men, women, and excited children fill the streets and village squares. Awareness of

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specific development programmes can be raised and incorporated into local festivals through prize awards.

i. Music/Lyrics: Music and lyrics constitute essential aspects of socio-cultural and religious life in Africa. Developmental messages, when incorporated into songs, can raise awareness and educate rural dwellers about various issues. Music springs from the life of society and is typically performed to express shared values on various ritual and social occasions. The venues of performance, as well as the genres of the music performed by the musicians, are prescribed or somehow determined by the norms of the particular society. Music, when performed in its rightful context, nearly always carries information which is, for the most part, intended to elicit some form of response from listeners, among whom or to whom it is performed.

j. Drama: Local drama groups provide opportunities for local expressions on a human scale, likely interest a wider range of individuals. A radical change in thinking about a subject matter, brought to reality through drama, is expected to occur when the individual or group visualises the outcome of behaving in a particular way. Drama arouses deep psychological and cultural emotions. The use of well-known actors and stars in local community programs has continued to prove a successful strategy almost everywhere it is employed. Actual behavioural change almost always requires a personal touch, perhaps through influential community members or someone with experience.

k. Records: Many societies keep formal records - written, carved, painted, or memorised. Examples include South Asian treatises on animal management written on palm leaves, ancient bai lan scripts on leaves preserved in Thai Buddhist temples, and similar leaves that record land ownership and tax obligations in Bali. Such records need not be written: African storytellers narrate memorised historical epics and genealogies at length. Proverbs and folklore are other vehicles.

#### Socio-cultural Advantages of Traditional Media

The apparent advantages that folk or traditional media have over modern mass media in promoting development are a reason they are widely used in development campaigns. Compared with contemporary mass media, folk media are more familiar and closer to people at the grassroots level, which would seem to make them more effective channels for presenting new and development ideas to ordinary people, such as modern family planning. As personal forms of entertainment and channels of communication, folk media such as traditional drama, storytelling, and folk singing are integral to people's way of life and thus provide a fruitful means of disseminating ideas. Again, as grassroots entertainment media, they cover primary and intimate social groups, and their messages reach those groups and, therefore, the well-

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established communication network of any community. Traditional modes of communication address people's values and beliefs, which would seem to make them practical means for social engineers to bring about behavioural changes, such as adopting family planning practices. This is because people's values and beliefs play a vital role in whether they accept or reject innovations such as modern family planning. Unlike modern mass media, which are usually produced for large, heterogeneous audiences, folk media can use local dialects to disseminate ideas in the most intimate, down-to-earth way at the village level in rural areas.

## Approaches to Indigenous Knowledge

Various underlying views of indigenous knowledge can be identified in the literature. These views are not all mutually exclusive -- indeed, they overlap to some degree. Some individuals lean toward one view without necessarily rejecting the others. Below are brief stereotypes of seven such opinions.

a. The Scientist studies indigenous knowledge for its own sake -- as an interesting phenomenon that may yield insights into culture (as in anthropological research) or the physical world (as in biomedical research to identify plants that contain hitherto unknown active ingredients for drugs). The scientist views knowledge as something to be shared openly for the betterment of all humankind.

b. The Development Agent sees that farmers and other local people are acutely attuned to their surroundings. They have intimate knowledge of their soils, climates, and markets. Recommendations derived from outside research may not fit local needs and require costly inputs. The development agent recognises that recommendations are more likely to be valuable and sustainable if they are based on existing practices and are couched in terms that local people readily understand.

c. The Facilitator pressures for indigenous knowledge as a resource that local people can use to further their own development. Instead of trying to persuade farmers to adopt technologies developed elsewhere, this view holds that agricultural extensionists and other development workers should facilitate farmers' experiments and encourage local people to exchange information.

d. The Conservationist views with alarm the current rapid rates of environmental destruction and biodiversity loss. Traditional, minority societies occupying remote, often forested and mountainous areas, are suffering similar disruption under the onslaught of ecological destruction, urbanisation, and outside culture. The conservationist advocates protecting these societies and preserving their cultures and knowledge in situ.

e. The Political Advocate perceives local people as being suppressed by wealthy, often foreign, elites. This view supports the protection of rights and the end of exploitation.

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It denies the scientist's ideal of sharing wisdom for mutual benefit, instead viewing relationships as having potential for exploitation. Sanctions must protect the weaker party—for instance, by introducing patent rights for indigenous knowledge to prevent its expropriation by outsiders.

f. The Capitalist, by contrast, sees indigenous knowledge as a resource to be tapped by outsiders in pursuit of a profit. Examples include the "chemical prospecting" of tropical forests by drug companies and germplasm collection by crop breeding firms. Both may draw on local knowledge to identify promising sites, species, and uses. The capitalist makes a significant investment of knowledge and money in developing, say, a new crop variety from such germplasm. This, it is argued, dwarfs the original local contribution and justifies the firm's patenting of the array. Aspiring to the scientist's quest for knowledge and free access to information, universities and herbaria are often unwitting partners of the capitalist.

g. The Sceptic views indigenous knowledge at best as amusing and at worst as dangerous superstition -- a barrier to progress. According to the sceptic, indigenous knowledge should be eradicated as soon as possible through education and the modernisation process. If only local people were "rational," the sceptic argues, they would recognise the superiority of introduced technologies or new economic forms. Sadly, the sceptic's view is the dominant one among policymakers and government personnel.

## Conclusion

If indigenous communication is ignored, the result might be inappropriate development efforts. Hence, this paper has discussed the channels of IK communication/dissemination, and transfer, as well as the importance of channels such as the town crier and folk media. In addition, approaches to IK were highlighted.

IK is stored in people's memories and activities. "It is expressed in stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, dances, myths, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local languages and taxonomy, agricultural practices, equipment, materials, plant species, and animal breeds." Indigenous knowledge is not written down. It is held in people's heads, passed down from one generation to the next by word of mouth. However, how is this information communicated? How do people learn indigenous knowledge? Who is involved? How is the communication organised? Indigenous communication encompasses the transmission of entertainment, news, persuasion, announcements, and social exchanges of all kinds. Effective communication is an iterative process between people who want both to share their knowledge and to listen to others. There is no 'perfect' medium for this exchange of views: the best medium

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is the one that is appropriate to the people taking part. You will know from years of communicating with others that you try to present your ideas in a way that suits the audience's needs, level of understanding, and expectations.

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