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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The interplay between Indigenous languages and Indigenous knowledge in Africa.

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Introduction

Indigenous languages have been gradually eroded in Africa since the onslaught of colonialism. During this period African indigenous languages were denigrated and labeled inferior to English and other Anglo Saxon languages this was intended to destroy the unity, identity, culture and the indigenous knowledge of the African people. This left people uneasy and feeling lost without their common identity through which they could express themselves. Globalisation has come pre-packaged with cultural imperialism and this has strained local languages and culture. If Africa is to rediscover, maintain and advance its knowledge then indigenous languages should be maintained. Each language reflects a unique view of the world, a pattern of thought and culture. Every language represents a special way of viewing human experience and the world itself hence language is a powerful ideological tool. Language is thus an important resource as any other national resource that needs to be protected. Indigenous languages are not only a means of communication but are representative of the collective memory of a people's history -African people's history. As the attrition of indigenous languages continues the culture and the knowledge systems are also on the verge of extinction. Ngugi wa Thiongo once remarked that language is not only a means of communication but a carrier of culture and customs. The paper explores the links between indigenous languages and indigenous knowledges and how indigenous languages and knowledges are tied to development. It will explore the importance attached to indigenous languages and the potential role that cultural institutions may play in preserving indigenous languages thereby assisting in the preservation of the African identity. The paper will highlight the role of proverbs, riddles, folktales, songs, legends and myths in indigenous languages and their relevance to African societies.

Definition of Key Terms

Indigenous languages

Indigenous languages refer to the various native languages spoken in throughout Africa. These are languages that are spoken in specific localities. The indigenous languages spoken in Zimbabwe are ChiShona, isiNdebele, Tshikalanga, TshiVenda, Chitonga, ChiTshongana and ChiNambya. They are usually recognized, by members to which they are first languages. It should be noted that of all the indigenous languages in Zimbabwe, ChiShona and isiNdebele dominate and overshadow other indigenous languages.

Indigenous knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is knowledge that is unique to a given culture, community or society. It is contrasted and differentiated from the knowledge gained at formal institutions. Indigenous knowledge systems encompass all aspects of life, such as the management of natural environment. It forms the basis of survival for the people who own the knowledge. Indigenous knowledge may be part of an on-going experiment or maybe even be an established local tradition (Slum, 2006). Indigenous knowledge is a result of many generations and is cultivated over pro longed years encompassing experiences, careful observations and trial and error experiments evolving over centuries (Martin, 1995). Thus over centuries, indigenous people of various localities would have developed their own specific knowledge on plant resource use, management and conservation over time. (Cotton, 1996).

Globalisation

Globalisation is the stretching of power and communications across the globe and it involves the compression of time and space, and the recomposition of social relationships. Thus it reflects a world in which societies, cultures, politics and economics have in some sense come together. Globalisation is the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events happening away and vice-versa. (Mohammad, 1997).

Cultural imperialism

According to Schiller (1986) cultural imperialism is the subjection of a country to undue pressure by a culture of the metropolitan, bigger power. It is characterized by a unidirectional pattern, creating imbalances and a colonial culture of dependence on the North by the South. The imposition of cultural values on third world countries by Western countries is a non violent, subtle and slow process which results in culture a of dependence on the west by the Third World. Dependence on the West takes various forms, but would include looking up to the west for the supply of cultural products like films, news and entertainment. Cultural dependence also includes reliance on the west for technology to produce and disseminate these cultural products. Thus cultural imperialism may be viewed as the use of economic and political power to exalt and spread the values and habits of a foreign culture at the expense of a native culture.

Characteristics of Indigenous knowledge

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is found in the form of tacit knowledge and is therefore not codified or systematically recorded and thereby making it difficult to transfer or share. IK tends to live solely in the memory of the beholder and is mostly oral, meaning that unless transferred, it dies with the beholder thus a whole or huge chunk of the community's "library" is lost upon the death of the IK holder. The knowledge is embedded in the culture, traditions, ideology, language and religion of a particular community and is therefore not universal and is therefore difficult to nationalize and let alone globalize. It is mostly rural, commonly practiced among poor communities and is therefore not suitable in multicultural, urban and economically provided communities. The spiritual and epistemological aspects about IK are difficult to transfer and verify and they are fears that attempts to document IK will result in the social dis-empowerment of the community and owners of the IK.

Ellen and Harris (1996) highlighted the characteristics of IK as being local, meaning that it is rooted in a particular community and situated within broader cultural traditions, a set of experiences generated by people living in those communities. When transferred to other places, there is a potential risk of dislocating IK. The same authors also pointed out that IK is tacit; therefore it is not easily codifiable. Berlin (1992) argued that due to the IK being transmitted orally, or through imitation and demonstration, codifying it may lead to the loss of some of its properties. The local communities which have survived over the years actually act as rigorous laboratories to IK thereby making it experiential, rather than theoretical knowledge. Davis and Ebbe (1995) submitted that IK is learned through repetition, which is a defining characteristic of tradition even when new knowledge is added. The same authors are of the opinion that repetition aids in the retention and reinforcement of IK. Grenier (1998) argued that contrary to external observers who regard IK as static, IK actually changes constantly as it is produced and reproduced, discovered as well as lost.

Some experts caution against any attempts to transfer IK because they believe: IK cannot or should not be exchanged across communities because it could be irrelevant or even harmful outside its original cultural context; “Western” science is incapable of appreciating traditional cultures; and that attempts to record, document and transfer IK could lead to the dis-empowerment of indigenous people. Sensitive approaches will, therefore, be needed to reduce the potential risk of dis-empowerment of local communities, without compromising the principle of global knowledge partnership for the benefit of all communities.

Many practitioners of traditional medicine widely use a large number of plants well known to them (Mesfin and Sebsebe, 1992). Nevertheless, many are less cooperative to share their knowledge and skill in traditional medicines with others. According to Pankhurst (1990), the knowledge on medicinal plants and method of use is circulated mainly among practitioners and the beneficiaries of such practice which are usually close family members. This has made the knowledge and skill on traditional medicinal plants and traditional medicine more hidden but less available to the public (Abbink, 1995). Often traditional methods of treatment and other forms of indigenous knowledge go into spiritual and metaphysical realms which make the scientific study, documentation and transfer difficult leading to the gradual erasure of IK. Thus IK is facing extinction.

The Importance attached to Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge provides the basis for problem solving strategies for local communities, especially the poor. It represents an important component of global knowledge on development issues. Learning from IK, by investigating first what local communities know and have, can improve understanding of local conditions and provide a productive context for activities designed to help communities. Adapting international practices to local setting can help improve the impact and sustainability of development assistance.

According to 1998 World Bank report, a better understanding of the local conditions, including indigenous knowledge system and practices could help to better integrate global technologies to solve the problems facing local communities in developing countries, Zimbabwe included. According to Chavhunduka (1994) the contribution of Indigenous Medicine Knowledge (IMK) in the provision of health care in rural Zimbabwe has been revealed through traditional healing, practiced by local herbalists. Saruchera (1999) is of the opinion that from a cultural perspective, people are comfortable with traditional medicine, are satisfied with the results and therefore many choose traditional medicine regardless of the existence of Western medicine. The African potato (hypoxic species) known as Nhindiri in Shona, has been used by indigenous communities in Zimbabwe in treating various ailments and is now popular for its ability to relieve complications associated with HIV / AIDS infection. (Koro, 2005)

The local weather and climate can be assessed and predicted by locally observed variables and experiences using combinations of plant, animals, insects, and meteorological and astronomical indicators. Thus IK may be used to predict different weather and seasonal climate conditions. The behaviour of certain animals is believed to indicate changes in the weather : (1) Mating behaviour of domestic birds like guinea fowl which normally are secretive may communicate an unfavourable weather forecast. (2) The bird Robin Chat disappears for several months and only reappears when the rain season begins. The swallows *Hirundo Abyssinia* and *Hirundo Smithic* White stock (*Shuramurove*) exhibit circular movements in the sky when the rain is forming. Certain seasonal cries of birds are

also believed to communicate changes in the weather. (3) The Sparrol (Nyenganyenga) if many may signify that more rainfall will be experienced. (Saruchera, 1999).

How Indigenous Knowledge is Transferred and Shared

Hunn (1993) argued that although IK is readily shared among members of a community, that is in so far as these IK practices are a part of the daily life of the community, it is generally shared to a lesser degree across communities. Moreover as IK is predominately tacit or embedded in practices and experiences it is mostly commonly exchanged through personal communications and demonstration with indigenous languages as the main medium of such exchanges, from neighbour to neighbour, from priest to parish, and from master to apprentice. Davis and Ebbe (1995) also pointed out that recording tacit knowledge and transferring and dissemination it, is therefore a challenge. Indigenous knowledge can only be stored within indigenous languages and customs. The same authors reiterated that it is easy to transfer IK within a community were providers and recipient speak the same language and share its underlining concepts. According to World Bank report of 1998 on indigenous knowledge for development, exchange of indigenous knowledge is a process which comprises of six steps. Recognition and identification of IK is the first step, but it is critical to appreciate that IK may be embedded in a mix of technologies or in cultural values, rendering them unrecognizable to the external observer especially one who does not understand the indigenous language in which the IK is coded into.

Stearman (1989) reiterated that storage in retrievable repositories of IK is a critical component, if transfer of IK is to a success. Storage involves categorization and indexing, relating IK to other information and making it accessible, and to conserve, preserve and maintain it for later use. However storage should not be restricted to only text documents, but should include other retrievable types of repositories of information such as tapes, films, and database and IK practitioners. However, despite whatever form the repository used takes, the language used to store it is very important, as usually attempts to change the language results in the loss of some aspects of the knowledge.

The World Bank report of 1998 on indigenous knowledge for development points out that the transfer of IK goes beyond conveying it to the potential recipient. Any important element of the transfer is to test the knowledge in the new environment. Technical feasibility, social and environmental impact of the IK need to be examined by the recipients. These transfers could be supported by government and donor agencies. The transfer may involve intensive practical training, apprenticeship or demonstration. It is critical at this point to realize that some local practices can only be transferred directly from practitioner to practitioner, for instance when IK is being transferred within the community whereby the language used is the same.

Berlin (1992) submitted that once the transfers and adaption process has been carried out successfully, the dissemination of IK to a wider community adds the developmental dimension to the exchange of knowledge and could bring about a wider and deeper impact of the knowledge transfer. Public awareness campaign, public broadcasting, advertisements, seminars, workshops and publications incorporating IK could be part of the dissemination activities. Essentially IK transfer is a learning process were by the community where an IK practice originates, the urgency that transmits the practice and the community that adopts and adapts the practice all learn during the practices.

Traditional Means of Exchange of Indigenous Knowledge

Actors and Mode Transfer	Sectors	Means and Media	Context of Exchange	Content	Potential for Direct Involvement of the Donor Community
Parents –	.environment	.oral	.hierarchy	.traditional	.limited unless

children	.agriculture and animal husbandry . nutrition .handicrafts	. practice . artifacts		skills .common practices . values	through adult education
Trainer-apprentice	.local medicine .village based craft . PHC	. oral . practice . individual training	. hierarchy . reputation . expertise	. news . specialized knowledge and skills . values . awareness	.moderate TA, volunteer services
Public exchange (Markets, gathering etc.)	.environment, agriculture . nutrition . markets . handicrafts	. oral . artifacts . practice	. parity . reputation . expertise . authority	. news . products . awareness	.moderate by supporting campaigns
Informal groups	. environment . agriculture . nutrition .handicrafts	. oral . artifacts . practice	. parity . reputation . expertise . hierarchy	. news .specialized knowledge and skills . values . awareness	. low
Local organizations and traditional authorities	. environment . agriculture . nutrition .handicrafts . community development	. oral .sketches and plays . songs	. parity .competition . reputation . expertise . hierarchy	. news .specialized knowledge and skills . values . values . awareness	Moderate training, support to NGOs and CBOs
Story tellers	Unspecified,	. oral	. Reputation	. news	. moderate

	community development			. specialized technical information . values	
Spiritual leaders	. environment . agriculture . health .community development	. oral . artifacts	. authority	. values .community development	.moderate cooperation, co-financing
Productive activities	. handcrafts . agriculture . environment .community development	. oral . artifacts	Reputation, parity, competition	. news .specific information	.high if targeted within sector approach
Migration	. environment . crafts . values		. parity . competition . expertise	.Knowledge and skills . values	.moderate in refugee and settlement programs

Source: World Bank staff

The above methods are the ones which are traditionally used by various communities in transferring indigenous knowledge. It is important to note that methods of transferring IK such as storytelling and public exchanges such as “Dare” are no longer popular due to the fact that the younger generations spends most of its time utilizing modern media such as watching television, using social media or the internet a possible result of cultural imperialism.

The Role of Songs, Riddles, Myths & Legends in African society.

Riddles are used to cultivate quick thinking creativity and sharpening memory in young children. The riddles often involve a metaphysical or poetic comment; this indeed was noted long back by Aristotle when he remarked on the close relation of riddles to metaphysical expression. The imagery and poetic comment even in simple riddles are clearly part of the general literacy, cultural insight into the nature of people’s behavior. Riddles are often expressed best in local indigenous languages. Riddles have proved that indigenous knowledge systems are not something that is static, but a form of education and entertainment. There is a type of art that involves metaphorical or poetic comments on things for example young children can be entertained through their creative prowess as they create proverbs like “vasikana kururai marokwe tinakirwe” [girls pull up your dresses so that we can enjoy ourselves] the answer to this riddle is bananas or oranges: The idea is that one has to remove the cover or orange rind so that he/she

eats the oranges. In Chewa, there is a riddle which says “zungurira uko tiphe timba” [go round so that we kill the wild cat.] Men eat the wild cat. The answer to this riddle is the action of relieving oneself. The idea is that one goes to a hidden place when relieving him/herself.

Songs are also used to teach the youngsters to memorize concepts as given in the song ‘matsiro dhendere’ [in counting] and good quality of personality as in “sarura wako” “kadeya-deya wendoro chena” [choose the one you want who is good.] Many African men and women that have never been to school have been educated or have acquired knowledge in their own way. Transmission of knowledge in the oral tradition is largely informal and depends on the indigenous language. Though informal, learning had specific methods, well selected learning materials and facilitators who were highly regarded as experts. Common methods of importing knowledge were mainly participants observation, oral tradition, linking at all times knowledge, experience and practice hence learning was fun not agony with the main vehicle of transfer being indigenous languages. Participatory methods are also used for imparting esthetic values where Africans can express their lives through woodwork, pottery basketry, playing and dancing to musical instruments or hunting (Chigumo, 2011)

The Globalisation and its implication on indigenous culture and knowledge

Globalisation has had severe implications on the third world countries and their ability to promote indigenous languages. Developed nations because of their technological capabilities have the ability to produce and disseminate information efficiently and speedily to developing nation. The implications of this scenario are that the African societies depend on foreign produced information. The foreign media products will be laced with foreign cultural elements and will be produced in foreign languages, mainly English language. Inevitably African societies have in essence been promoting English language at the expense of indigenous local languages. The language used in the education system becomes a central issue since our entire experience and knowledge is mediated by language as language reflects our values, culture, indigenous knowledge and beliefs in society. (Sondering, 1996) Language is not only a vehicle of technical and cultural development of the individual and society but also an index of social thought and a way of thinking. Thus language becomes the primary means through which ideology is communicated and imposed. This has resulted in a phenomenon known as cultural imperialism.

The promotion of foreign languages in the education system owing to the imbalance in information flow poses a great threat to the existence of indigenous languages and culture especially minority indigenous languages. The cultural erosion which ensues from the consumption of foreign media products poses a ‘real threat’ to indigenous languages which are the reservoirs of indigenous knowledge and culture. In realising the cultural threat posed by the imbalance in information flow non aligned nation’s ignited the debate on the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). According to McBride and Roach (1994) most NAM countries realized that despite having acquired political independence some crucial aspects such as the economy and socio-cultural spheres like the media or the education system were either not under their control or not reflecting the indigenous aspirations and culture. In the media and cultural sector newly independent developing states were often the recipients of biased and hegemonic cultural texts from their former colonizers. In other terms this meant and still implies that the definitions of the images of the developing world, their values, languages and culture are still determined by the developed world. Anything indigenous be it language, knowledge, education or culture was and still is denigrated and trivialised. During the NWICO debate the global media, among other factors like education and religion, were identified as the key culprits in the deliberate onslaught on ‘Third World cultures and indigenous knowledges’.

Although IK is largely inseparable from any realistic knowledge and Knowledge Management or classification paradigm, marginalization of IK has occurred over the years, and has retarded its development and integration. While IK has existed within the Zimbabwean communities since time immemorial for there is no community that does not have elements of IK - the degree of such possession varies, and seemingly the more a community possesses or practices it, the more the individual or community is marginalized or stigmatized. We only have to imagine perceptions people hold about such rural communities as Binga for example. Marginalization has also occurred because families and communities are becoming increasingly disintegrated and globalised, a trend that may have stemmed from the push and pull of technologies, and the over-extensive supply of mass products, services and mass media gadgets and content which have evaded private spaces where IK once thrived. Images of families glued to TV sets and surfing the internet on mobile phones and utilizing these through foreign languages easily come to mind.

Thus the time and forums for sharing IK have been displaced by globalization products and aided with “global languages” reducing opportunities for IK transfer. Marginalization of IK has occurred because it has always been associated with the rural poor of the developing nations.

Of crucial importance is the culture which comes attached with the multimedia products and the global media through its cultural products of films, soap operas and global media advertising. These promote cultural imperialism and a consumerist consciousness attaching ideologies of life style and personalities to products. This has made more and more people adhere to western life styles and western knowledge systems. This has contributed immensely to the denigration of IK thereby limiting its transfer.

However, globalization has brought with it certain technologies which have the potential of harnessing the collection and documentation as well as dissemination of IK. The ubiquitous presence of the internet and electronic data bases and video recording equipment can be used to good effect in accommodating IK which is usually orally transmitted. The major challenge remains that of the digital divide to enable access to IK once it has been stored in the new multimedia technologies. There is also the challenge that the multimedia technologies de-contextualizes IK thus alienating IK from its owners. The challenge lies in harnessing new technologies in ways that are culturally relevant and this includes retaining the local language in which IK is coded.

The Role of Indigenous Language & Knowledge in Development

The role of language in facilitating and enabling national development is universally acknowledged and it is also widely believed that indigenous languages could bring about sustainable national development in the developing world. From the NWICO debate it is clear that the media of the developing World has not lived up to their expectations that of promoting indigenous languages, culture, values and ideology. One of the key functions of mass communication identified by Lawell (1948) and Wright (1960) is cultural transmission. This is the ability of the media to communicate norms, rules and values of a society. This function is also regarded as a teaching function of mass communication. However, what culture is there for the third world media to transmit or teach when the majority of what they transmit and teach are foreign to their citizens and are in a foreign language replete with foreign values and ideology. There is no gainsaying in the fact that the language (and culture) of development is the mother tongue or are indigenous languages rooted in the people’s culture and tradition, a language in which the generality of the nation’s populace have unimpeded and unconscious facility in all forms of communication (Essien 2003). The Asmara declaration, which some developing countries are signatories to, recognizes the fact that ‘the effective and rapid development of science and technology in Africa depends on the use of African languages; and modern technology must be used for the development of African languages’. African governments, through Broadcasting and media commissions, should as a matter of urgency, take steps that will compel the various media houses to broadcast and transmit majority of their programs in languages indigenous to its people. If, however, governments fail to do this, two major things are likely to happen. There is the likelihood of culturecide – this is the extermination of cultures, an analogous concept to (physical) genocide. Also, the vast sums developing governments spend on all areas of development will go down the drain because, according to Mazrui & Mazrui (2002),

.... No country has ascended a first rank technological and economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages. Japan rose to dazzling industrial heights by scientificating the Japanese language and making it the medium of its own industrialization.... Can Africa ever take-off technologically if it remains so overwhelmingly dependent on European languages for discourse on advance learning. Can Africa look to the future if it is not adequately sensitive to the cultural past?

It is quite evident that the education system in Africa as the engine of development must give indigenous languages and its associated IK high priority if indigenous languages are to play an active role in the transmission of culture

and in enabling development. The African continent in particular has a duty to meet the diverse linguistic needs of its society and ensure that the minority indigenous languages and IK are protected.

Who has the prerogative to determine knowledge facts and truths and on what basis are these carried out? The whole state of affairs point to issues and debates on knowledge tension and struggle. As Payle and Lebakeng (2004:296) rightly ask “if indigenous knowledge systems hold the key to sustainable development, why was this opportunity not exploited earlier?” Payle and Lebakeng also mention that the answer “is to be found in the nature and dominance of Western science in knowledge production” (2004:296). The current century is the century of self-discovery and self-assertion, despite the cold and subtle wars and tensions that continue around the world, including the African continent. The time of re-awakening and rejuvenation cannot exclude the re-awakening of indigenous knowledge and languages. One does not claim that the process has unfolded optimally, but simply notes the positive move to acknowledge the damage to indigenous knowledge and languages. This implies that Africa, experienced a period of knowledge paralysis, the impact of which resulted in the denigration of Africans and the ‘baggage’ that brought them into contention with exogenous knowledge systems. This paralysis retarded the progress of African *scientisation* and allowed exogenous theoretical and methodological frames to triumph. In the course of the knowledge paralysis, some ‘mind-boggling’ knowledge systems (scientifically) were pirated by the dominant knowledge systems through foreign languages and flourished at the expense of the knowledge stolen from the peripheral communities.

An example that is worth mentioning in this regard is the South African beer brewing business (commonly known as sorghum beer). History makes it clear that during the forced removals and cheap labor (which was enforced socially, politically and economically) of the apartheid era, which resulted in the establishment of ‘townships’ such as Soweto (for South Western Township), a number of African women accompanied their husbands to areas of congregation designed by their apartheid masters. These women remained at home in dwellings the size of ‘matchboxes’ while their husbands worked in mines without insurance or any means of protection. One of the women’s ideas for supplementing their husbands’ incomes was to brew beer, which was sold around the mines and market places and even from their homes. It should be noted that the knowledge of brewing beer (the scientific thinking and procedure) came from their grandmothers and mothers in the backgrounds in which they had been brought up. This knowledge was turned into a technology, as science became a scientific tool. Given this type of background and the economic importance of this thriving knowledge, the users and controllers of the dominant exogenous knowledge began to ‘pirate’ indigenous knowledge. There was a move to sabotage the industry by outlawing the sale of home-brewed beer. Anyone found selling and marketing such products (mostly women) were placed in police custody. Surprisingly, some years later ‘formal industries’ were established to further the same business activity, taking it from the local practitioners. The ‘formal industries’ ‘improved’ their technology, but the knowledge remained the same. The fact remains, and will do for centuries to come, that this is stolen knowledge.

There is a misconception on Indigenous Knowledge which seems to suggest that IK is only about traditional healing and practices. Currently a number of gatherings on IK are usually dominated by a strong delegation of traditional healers. This could mislead and misguide to mean that IK is only about healing. On the contrary, healing forms a miniscule part of a wider system of knowledge. The challenge rests with pioneers of IK philosophy and theory to unpack the meaning and practice of IK.

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) provides the basis for problem-solving strategies for local communities, especially the rural and urban poor. It represents an important component of global knowledge on development issues. IK is an under-utilized resource in the development process. Learning from IK, by investigating first what local communities know and have, can improve understanding of local conditions and provide a productive context for activities designed to help communities. Understanding IK can increase responsiveness to clients. Adapting international practices to the local setting can help improve the impact and sustainability of development assistance. Sharing IK within and across communities can help enhance cross-cultural understanding and promote the cultural dimension of development.

Studies in various parts of the continent show that the majority of Africans, still depend largely on Indigenous Knowledge for survival. Without this knowledge many African communities would simply not be able to survive. African Indigenous Knowledge is still an important tool for sustainable development. It is applicable in a range of areas and site-specific situations. It is still relatively abundant in various communities in Southern Africa and the continent at large, and is taken for granted in most places. Millions of Africans, particularly those living in arid and semi-arid areas such as the San, Batswana, Masai, Tuareg, just to mention a few, would not have survived if it had not been for their IK. Formally, however, IK is underestimated and under-valued for various reasons. These include:

- Demolition of local African cultures and language by westernization;
- A prevailing colonial mentality;
- Increasing control by government;
- An institutional framework that is heavily tilted against creativity, diversity and promotion of African local knowledge systems;
- A bureaucratic system that is lured to accepting and promoting the modern, scientific packages from the west. The catch with this approach is dependency, debts and great disparity in development;
- The culling of IK by those outside the system for financial gain.

The Challenges confronting Indigenous Languages and Knowledge in Africa.

Problems facing indigenous-language media in Africa are a reflection of problems facing the languages of the continent in general. In most parts of Africa communication in indigenous languages has been adversely affected by the choice of the colonial language as the official language. Indigenous languages are not highly esteemed for example in Zimbabwe as is the case in most parts of Africa, English and other languages of former colonial powers like French (in Francophone west Africa) and Portuguese as well as western education remain the vehicles of wealth accumulation, socio-economic power and progress in life. Former colonial power languages, especially English continue to dominate as the languages of official communication largely due to their economic muscle as the official languages of communication. The media in the developing world has been using official foreign languages as a means of communication hence neglecting indigenous local languages. This is more pervasive in the print media.

The situation is much better in the broadcast media. Radio stations, across Zimbabwe as is the case with some African states; have contributed to the promotion of the nation's indigenous languages. However, some FM stations like Power FM and Sport FM are almost exclusively for the English language. While Radio Zimbabwe and National FM stations are aired in indigenous languages like Shona, Ndebele, Venda and Kalanga. As cited earlier the broadcasting commission in Zimbabwe with its 75% local content quota as with the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission with its stipulated 60:40 ratio for local and foreign content of broadcasting, the acts do not stipulate what percentage of local content should be in indigenous languages. So, if a programme is produced in English, but by locals of the given nations, it is still considered local content. This stance is not helpful to the development of the local indigenous languages in Africa.

Generally, however, the fact still remains that indigenous languages fare better in the broadcast media than in the print media, indicating that African culture still remains, largely, an oral culture. Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, indigenous languages do well in the broadcast media, as compared with the print media. This is a country that one account credited with having more than 150 periodicals in indigenous languages during the colonial era. Whereas the indigenous language newspapers in the country (*Kimpagi, Beto na Beto*) are either dead or comatose, there is a growth of community radio stations throughout most of the country and in Uganda state radio is mandated to broadcast in as many of the indigenous languages of the nation as possible. Thus, on Radio Uganda one can hear 27 languages (including English and Kiswahili). A study done on Cameroon's indigenous language media also noted that there is hardly a remarkable indigenous language press in the country. There has, on the contrary, been a "medium-shift" from indigenous language press to indigenous language broadcasting.

Not all is gloomy in the arena of print media. There are some relative success stories. Ethiopia is a case in point. Of the 125 newspapers in the country, 108 are in Amharic, two in Oromo and one in Tigre. Ethiopia is one of the three countries in Africa (with Tanzania and Somalia) where a local language is used as a medium of instruction to a high level and for official and administrative purposes. Another success story is the publication of a daily Zulu newspaper in South Africa. It is reported that *Isolezwe*, launched in 2002, has even lured readers away from established English newspapers. *Kwayedza* is another success story in Zimbabwe. It has an 80 000 circulation figure and a readership of 121.4 readers per copy.

Recommendations on Preserving IK & Indigenous Languages

In order to encourage communication in African languages, the first step is to promote, vigorously, these languages through educational policy and adjusting language policies to cater for the promotion of the great diversity of indigenous local languages in Africa. The governments in Africa must be more serious about the enhancement of our cultural heritage, of which language is the single most important factor. In fact the African situation is, no different from other countries which have been colonized. The story, for instance, is the same in India. The only grace that the Indian indigenous language press has is that it enjoys subsidy from government; and this is what has been keeping it vibrant. African governments must follow suit by establishing fully fledged indigenous language media houses in print and broadcasting geared towards the promotion of indigenous local languages. The promotion of a reading culture in African languages is a programme that should be pursued vigorously this requires that the usually weak indigenous book publishing industry be strengthened so that adequate material in indigenous languages maybe published to meet the demand generated by the media campaigns promoting indigenous language reading cultures. Media campaigns should be mounted, among other things, while encouragement and adequate financial support should be given to creative writing and publishing in indigenous African languages. Public and private sectors, including media operators, should also come together to organise seminars and workshops where there can be cross fertilisation of ideas on how to improve the African media using indigenous African languages.

African linguists have an urgent task in producing glossaries of scientific and technological terminologies in African languages. These will aid journalists handling stories in areas that are scientific and technological. Publishers of African language newspapers whether government or private organisations should strive to make the newspapers easily affordable and available through the production of adequate circulation copies. Through this, the newspapers can serve the information needs of the people and become a familiar part of their lives. Proprietors of African language media should make deliberate efforts to popularise and educate the public about their operations while journalists working in the media should be more aggressive in their information gathering and in the promotion of indigenous languages and IK.

Public and private sectors should also encourage the existence of African language media through advertisements/commercials and supplements in these media. In addition it would be best if such commercials are to be placed in the newspapers using indigenous languages as a means of communication. The various institutes and departments of journalism and media studies in Africa should also help in this crusade through admission policies and curricula that promote the use of indigenous languages in the media. They should for instance make a pass in an African language compulsory for candidates seeking admission into their programmes. And, in their curricula, they should make compulsory the taking of courses in an African language. Thus there should be a drive to Africanise journalism as a profession in the ultimate aim of making the African media more relevant to Africa through prioritizing indigenous languages and culture.

For indigenous knowledge to have significant bearing on sustainable development African societies it must gain some currency in schools, the social institution officially chartered to organize learning, certify knowledge and train

the next generation of citizens. And yet across the continent, education has been the sector least likely to embrace Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) or to regard indigenous science as a legitimate source of inspiration for the youth and local communities' development.

Studies in various parts of the world, including Africa, show that there is a growing recognition of the value of indigenous knowledge and language for sustainable development. It is therefore culturally and educationally appropriate to sustain and promote African indigenous knowledge and languages in local communities through integrating it into the school curriculum.

Indigenous knowledge is stored in culture in various forms, such as traditions, customs, folk stories, folk songs, folk dramas, legends, proverbs, myths, etc. Use of these cultural items as resources in schools can be very effective in bringing indigenous knowledge alive for the students. It would allow them to conceptualize places and issues not only in the local area but also beyond their immediate experience. Students will already be familiar with some aspects of indigenous culture and, therefore, may find it interesting to learn more about it through these cultural forms. It would also enable active participation as teachers could involve students in collecting folk stories, folk songs, legends and proverbs that are retold in their community.

In view of its potential value for sustainable development, it is necessary to preserve indigenous knowledge for the benefit of future generations. Perhaps the best way to preserve indigenous knowledge would be the integration of indigenous knowledge into the school curriculum. This would encourage learners to learn from their parents, grandparents and other adults in the community, and to appreciate and respect their knowledge. Such a relationship between young and older generations could help to mitigate the generation gap and help develop intergenerational harmony. Indigenous people, for the first time perhaps, would also get an opportunity to participate in curriculum development. The integration of indigenous knowledge into school curriculum would thus enable schools to act as agencies for transferring the culture of the society from one generation to the next.

Conclusion

Indigenous languages and indigenous knowledge are inextricably linked. IK is stored and transmitted in local languages and any erosion on local languages results in the loss of local language. Customs and traditions form an integral part of IK with indigenous languages being the main means through which the cultural rituals are performed. The preservation of indigenous languages ultimately results in the protection of IK. However, it is sad that most indigenous languages are now often discussed within the context of "preservation" yet they should be languages of everyday communication between African people especially considering that they are the heart of African cultures and knowledge systems. There should be a paradigm shift in Africa towards giving priority to indigenous languages and knowledge which form the core of our African heritage.

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