Chapter 8
Libraries and Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge in Developing Countries:
The Nigeria Experience

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ABSTRACT

This chapter traces the role of libraries in the preservation of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in developing countries. It also highlights the nature of indigenous knowledge and the traditional role of libraries at preserving it for posterity; it discusses current issues surrounding the management of IK in libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions. It examines the various use of indigenous knowledge by array of information users within and outside the libraries. It x-rayed the traditional library services of identifying, acquiring, organizing, and presentation of IK to the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies. It concludes with the challenges in IK preservation and suggests measures that can be taken to alleviate the challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, libraries and archives are custodian of knowledge and cultural heritage; they hold drawings, paintings and other documentary artifacts, including manuscripts, records, books, audiovisual items, etc. These documentary resources have, until recently, consisted mostly of replicas of Indigenous peoples and their cultures by non Indigenous observers. IK has gained wider acceptance in the present global society and this has generated a lot of concern on the need to preserve and conserve it for the benefit of generations yet unborn. Different initiatives have been launched by both government and non-governmental organizations toward collection, preservation and dissemination of IK. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in its response to the need to properly preserve and disseminate IK to the human society recommended that libraries and archives should among other functions:

- Implement programs to collect, preserve, disseminate IK and local/traditional knowledge resources.
- Make available and promote information resources which support research and learning about IK and traditional knowledge, its importance and use in modern society;
- Publicise the value, contribution, and importance of IK and local traditional knowledge to both non indigenous and indigenous peoples;
- Involve elders and communities in the production of resources and teach children to understand and appreciate the traditional knowledge background and sense identity that is associated with IK systems;
- Urge governments to ensure the exemption from value added taxes of books and other recording media on IK and local traditional knowledge;

- Encourage the recognition of principles of intellectual property to ensure the proper protection and use of IK products derived from it (IFLA, 2004).

If libraries and information institutions subscribe to these recommendations, it would boost the level of awareness, access and use of IK in the modern time especially with the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This has revolutionized the way information is generated processed and disseminated. Corroborating this assertion, Christian (2009) stressed that one of the best modern approaches to preservation of traditional knowledge is documentation in some permanent form and public accessibility using information and communication technologies. It is in the light of this that this chapter intends to explore the role of libraries in the preservation of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in developing countries using Nigeria as a case study.

BACKGROUND

Libraries especially public libraries have been established with the aim of meeting the information needs of their immediate environment, through provision of information that are central to the needs of the people within and outside their community. This is reflected in the eleven core values of library as endorsed by the America Library Association, among which include: access, diversity, preservation, service and social responsibility. Together, these values address librarians' responsibility to meet the information needs of library users of all kinds by providing equitable access to a wide range of resources and services, and by supporting individual expression as a tenet of intellectual freedom. In another dimension, Byrne (2008) viewed archives, libraries, and museums as treasuries of Indigenous experience, knowledge and history. Libraries have long been crowned knowledge institutions as they provide the public

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