Chapter 13
Technological Learning and Innovations in Indigenous Leather Clusters in Nigeria:
Current Status and Policy Directions

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous technologies are integral part of the culture and history of a local community. The need to learn from local communities to enrich the development process cannot be over-emphasized. This chapter aims at advancing the position that Nigeria's indigenous technologies present significant opportunities for local economic transformation and global competitiveness. Analyses of two major indigenous leather clusters in Nigeria, as well as a review of successful country cases, throw up some specific strategic and policy issues. The chapter concludes that effective knowledge transfer and innovative capability build-up through appropriate government interventions are the basic requirements for sustainable growth of indigenous technologies in Nigeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Economic growth and human progress in Africa since independence can be judged mainly from basic infrastructural development and the improvement of the standard of living of the people (Okpoko, 1999). Most of the successive governments have paid attention to the provision of basic social amenities and economic structures with the aim of improving the lives of the citizenry. To this end, technology from virtually every nook and cranny of the world has been imported and applied in an effort to develop Africa. The range of technologies covers from agriculture and food processing to architecture and urban development, and from industrial facilities and mining to transport and communication, as well as other aspects of human endeavour. However, these efforts have not really led to sustainable development in terms of striking a balance between economic and social development, and the cultural and ecological adaptability of such developments. Hence, it is necessary for every developing nation (not only in Africa) to consider the role indigenous technologies can play in ensuring sustainable development. The need for developing countries to look inwards cannot be over-emphasised.

The knowledge systems developed by a community as opposed to the scientific knowledge that is generally referred to as 'modern' knowledge is often used to describe the term 'indigenous knowledge' (Ajibade, 2003). Indigenous knowledge (IK) is not confined to indigenous peoples alone rather all communities have, over the years developed their own body of knowledge (Gorjestani, 2001). IK is thus defined as the basis for community-level decision making in areas pertaining to food security, human and animal health, education, natural resource management and other vital socio-economic activities (Gorjestani, 2001; Boven and Moroashi, 2002). Furthermore, IK generally refers to the matured long-standing traditions and practices of certain regional, indigenous, or local communities as well as the wisdom, knowledge, and teachings of these communities. Grenier (1998) described IK as the unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographic area. When IK finds applications in tools, techniques, processes and methods that help in solving problems, indigenous technologies (I-Techs) arise. Basically, technology refers to the application of knowledge to provide solutions to problems, mostly of mankind. Some forms of traditional or IK are expressed through stories, legends, folklore, rituals, songs, and even laws while other forms are often expressed through different means (Acharya and Anshu, 2008). I-Techs have value not only for the culture in which they evolve, but also for scientists and planners striving to improve conditions in rural localities (Boven and Moroashi, 2002). In other words, I-Techs constitute the communities' main asset and vital components of their effort to gain control of their own lives. Hence, utilising IK or I-Tech does not only empower and bring recognition to local communities but could also help to improve aid effectiveness in poverty reduction. In view of these reasons, the potential contribution of IK to locally managed, sustainable and cost-effective survival strategies should be promoted in the development process especially in the developing economy context where these pockets of knowledge abound.

Nigeria is greatly blessed with gifted hands that are laboriously engaged in various types of indigenous technologies. There is hardly any part of the country that does not have a remarkable indigenous technology to show for its existence. The indigenous enterprises among others include (but not limited to) clusters of textile making, cloth weaving, bronze casting, leather tanning, and leather products, in various parts of the country. The IK supporting these enterprises is generally