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AN EVALUATION ON THE IMPACT OF PROVISION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF THE CHIKUNI MISSION COMMUNITY OF MONZE-ZAMBIA

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Abstract

Indigenous knowledge (IK) has been recognized world over as a resource that can be utilized to bring about development. It is the contention of this article that in Africa, the role of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in fostering development is even greater, taking into account that Africa houses a significant portion of the most under-developed countries in the world. The article observes though, that prescribed solutions to developmental problems Africa is facing are usually western type solutions that sometimes fail to take into account the differences in culture thus translating into failure in getting results. It is in this vein that this study was undertaken to evaluate the role Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute, as an indigenous knowledge system (IKS), plays in the dissemination of indigenous knowledge to communities in its locality. The objectives of the study were to identify developmental programmes the Institute was engaged in and their outcomes as well as the identification of indigenous knowledge resources the Institute was providing to foster sustainable development. The methodology used comprised a case study approach and use of purposive sampling, while the data collection techniques used were a guided interview and focus group discussions with Institute officials. The major findings revealed that the Institute was engaged in two long running developmental programmes, the first being the Traditional Under-Five Clinic which had saved many lives and solved a lot of health problems faced by young mothers and their infant children. The Institute also ran a Character, Morals and Life Skills Training Programme called Bulemu which had recorded low pregnancy levels and good academic and vocational performance among youths that had been through the programme. The article concludes that the application of indigenous knowledge can bring about development in Zambia and that it must be included among the priority development strategies.

Keywords:

Health, indigenous knowledge, national development, rural communities, Zambia

Introduction

According to Warren (1991) indigenous knowledge (IK) is the systematic body of knowledge acquired by local people through the accumulation of experiences, informal experiments and intimate understanding of the environment in a given culture. It is the basis for local-level

decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural resource management and a host of other activities in rural communities. Indigenous knowledge is the basic component of a country's knowledge system. It encompasses the skills, experiences and insights of people, applied to maintain or improve their livelihood (Ngulube 2002).

Warren, Von Liebenstein, and Slikkerveer (1993) observed that interest in the role that indigenous knowledge (IK) can play in truly participatory approaches to development has increased dramatically. This interest is reflected in the myriad of activities generated within communities that are recording their own knowledge for use in their educational systems and for planning purposes. In this vein, indigenous knowledge systems provide opportunities for designing development projects that emerge from problems identified and assigned priority by the beneficiaries themselves, and that build upon and strengthen community-level knowledge systems and organizations. In this regard, the World Bank (1997) has noted that in the emerging global knowledge economy, a country's ability to build and mobilize knowledge capital is equally essential for sustainable development as the availability of physical and financial capital.

In Africa, the role of indigenous knowledge systems in fostering development is even greater, taking into account that Africa houses a significant portion of the most under-developed countries in the world (Todaro and Smith 2003). However, Herman (2011) noted that following a declaration signed on 9 December 1999 by representatives of 24 African countries in Kampala the capital city of Uganda, cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge systems have been incorporated and accepted by a number of African governments and development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as vital in development planning and implementation. In fact a number of studies have reported on the successful application of indigenous knowledge in Africa to various developmental endeavours such as in the fight against HIV/AIDS and other diseases (Pakia *et al.*, 2008), and in improving agricultural production to attain sustainable reduction of hunger and poverty (Lwoga and Ngulube 2010). This is as it should be as the World Bank (1982) noted that solutions to developmental problems Africa is facing are usually western type solutions that sometimes fail to account for differences in culture thus translating into failure in getting results.

It can thus be contended that the application of indigenous knowledge in development programmes can lead to national development. Amongst the sectors of national development that requires indigenous knowledge is health. It is well understood that a healthy nation is a wealthy nation. Health encompasses the physical and mental well being of people. People should be physically and mentally fit to be productive to their full potential. One of the greatest anecdotes for this, is knowledge on the prevention of diseases and other health related issues such as nutrition, hygiene and reproduction. In this regard, there is need to put in place measures to make people aware of healthy lifestyles that may eventually change their behaviour positively. It should be noted that some of the knowledge actually required is indigenous. For instance, in the Iganga district of Uganda, Musoke (1999) reported that maternal mortality rates declined by 50% in three years resulting from the application of traditional knowledge with modern communication technologies by Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA). Traditional Birth Attendants, a system known and trusted by Ugandan women was improved by simply providing the TBAs with walkie –talkies to communicate with public health service workers from the outposts where cases in remote areas away from modern medical facilities were referred and treated using indigenous knowledge. In this way, a lot of lives were saved.

Additionally, Scheinman (2000) submitted that the regional hospital in the Pangani District of Tanzania ran an indigenous knowledge programme aimed at facilitating exchange of knowledge between healers, people living with HIV/AIDS and medical personnel. The hospital had

dedicated one ward to healers for treatment and counselling of patients. The success of the programme is reflected by over 2000 patients that had been treated by traditional healers from opportunistic HIV/AIDS related diseases with the use of medicinal plants. The indigenous knowledge programme was working in conjunction with the TANGA AIDS Working Group (TAWG), whose goal was to alleviate suffering from HIV/AIDS using indigenous knowledge (IK). The group was working in collaboration with the United States National Institute of Health to document and scientifically validate these herbal treatments. And according to the World Bank (n.d), the group had treated 5000 AIDS patients with herbs prescribed by local healers. The report further adds that patients who had responded most positively had lived longer by up to five years. It is thus important that each country has institutions that spearhead such indigenous knowledge programmes in specific areas such as health. In the case of Zambia, there is Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute.

Background to Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute

Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute is located at Chikuni Mission situated about 30 kilometres south east of Monze in the Southern Province of Zambia. The Institute was established by the Roman Catholic Jesuit fathers who are also responsible for the establishment and running of Chikuni Hospital, Canisius Secondary School, Chikuni Girl's Secondary School, and Charles Lwanga Teachers Training College located within Chikuni Mission. Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute documents, preserves and disseminate indigenous information. It runs two developmental programmes, namely, the traditional under-five clinic and a character building programme called *Bulemu*. However, there has been no assessment done on the programmes and outcomes of the Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute. It was thus important that a research be undertaken on the Institute to find out how Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute as an indigenous knowledge system was contributing to the preservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge in the country.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study was to investigate the role Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute as an indigenous knowledge system was playing in the documentation, preservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge to communities in its locality. The research had the following specific objectives:

- To identify developmental programmes the Institute was engaged in;
- To determine the outcomes of these developmental programmes;
- To establish indigenous knowledge resources the Institute provided to foster sustainable development; and
- To discover the challenges the Institute was encountering in implementing its programmes.

Methodology

The case study method approach was used for collecting data due to the in depth information required to achieve the aim of the research. Cassel and Symon (1994) confirm that extremely rich, detailed and in-depth information is gathered when using a case study approach. In it, qualitative research method was used with the aim of answering questions about the 'what' how or why of a phenomenon. This method helped give details about the programmes the Institute was involved in. Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006:71) note that qualitative research is "concerned with studies pertaining to people's perceptions or feelings towards certain policies, actions or other occurrences that cannot be measured numerically". All in all, this method was

used with the aim of understanding the opinions, experiences and attitudes of people running the programme in this particular community.

In terms of sampling, purposefully sampling was used to select officials from the Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute. The sampling procedure was aimed at selecting officials that were the longest serving, experienced and most knowledgeable about the indigenous knowledge developmental programmes the Institute was running. In all ten (10) officials were selected out of the 22 members of staff of the Institute. A guided interview and focus group discussion were used to collect data. According to Berg (2001), interviewing is a good method with a purpose of gathering detailed specific information.

Denzin and Lincoln (2002) point out that focus groups are designed for small groups usually between four and eight individuals brought together to discuss a particular chosen topic by researchers. Focus group discussion were considered important because they help clarify issues as one gets multiple responses and interactions by participants. The interview guide was used both for the interview and the focus group discussions. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. This involved interpreting the views and perceptions of respondents that were given both during the interviews and focus group discussions and later the data was grouped into various categories. As Cooper and Schindler (2001) point out this approach is useful as it helps in the reduction of data to manageable size, developing summaries and looking for patterns.

Findings and discussion

When determining the specific programmes for fostering sustainable development the Institute was involved in it was discovered that it ran two developmental programmes, namely, the traditional under-five clinic and a character building programme called *Bulemu*.

The Traditional Under-Five Clinic

The traditional under-five clinic embarked on by Mukanzubo Kalinda Cultural Institute is aimed at improving the livelihood of mothers and their young children and also to prevent loss of life during this delicate period. This traditional under-five clinic though is really a background activity that is only publicly shown at the Gonde Lwinda Ceremony of the Tonga people held in Monze District. The clinic is embodied by a sizeable hut containing a variety of traditional medicines, beads, objects and foods that are specially prescribed for young mothers and their infant children. Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute offers various traditional remedies and therapies for mothers and their infant children.

The Institute also carries out traditional vaccinations against malaria and measles. Children and infants are further screened for physical and psychological developmental milestones that they are expected to have reached at a certain age. In addition, mothers are provided with information on how to take care of themselves and their children in terms of hygiene, nutrition and health.

Impact of the Traditional Under-Five Clinic

The under-five clinic has treated many health cases where the local hospital treatments have failed. It has also been an alternative to patients who have not been able to access western type of treatment because they cannot afford hospital fees or due to the long distance to conventional clinics and hospitals. These results are similar to those obtained in Iganga District of Uganda in which Musoke (1999) reported that maternal mortality rates declined by 50% in three years

resulting from the application of traditional knowledge with modern communication technologies by Traditional Birth Attendants(TBA). The achievements of the under-five clinic at Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute are a significant contribution to the development of the local communities since only healthy individuals can be productive in any economic activity. In many rural areas of Zambia it is very difficult to access health centres as people have to trek long distances to find one. The situation is worse for mothers and young children, and those who are unable to reach rural health centres end up losing their lives.

Malnutrition is another major cause of death to children under the age of five both in urban and rural areas. Through conventional children's clinics and programmes such as child health weeks that are run by the Ministry of Health, deaths resulting from nutrition have been drastically reduced in urban areas and among rural communities that are close to health centres. The case is different with communities that do not have a health centre within reasonable walking distances. One respondent indicated that:

The education provided to young mothers on child care, hygiene, nutrition and health by the Institute has thus proved to be very valuable to the preservation of life as it ensures good health and prevents premature deaths.

Malaria and measles are also among killer diseases among children under the age of five. It is therefore remarkable that the traditional clinic has vaccines that can prevent these diseases among children who have been vaccinated.

Bulemu Character Building Programme

The second programme run by the Institute is appropriately roughly named *Bulemu*, a Tonga expression meaning respect. This programme is characterized by character, morals and life skills training. It is aimed at inculcating morals, norms and life skills into children between the ages of eight and fourteen. One respondent indicated that:

This programme was initiated due to the observation that these aspects are left out in the conventional western type education as is evidenced by the moral decay and other destructive behaviours on the rise among youths.

Bulemu signifies a way of life of a young person as prescribed by tradition. Values such as humility, respect for others especially the elderly and the fact that to survive one must work are imparted into the young. Thus, this involves ways of life prescribed by tradition characterized by good conduct, appreciation of culture, knowing how to relate with people and how to cope with various life situations. The programme also includes general hygiene of the individual especially when they approach adolescence. Specifically, the respondents indicated that:

the programme is not in opposition to western type education, and in fact it is run during school holidays to accommodate conventional schooling as well.

The *Bulemu* programme also includes a complementary radio programme, where conduct of the youth is discussed in general. This is used as a platform to elaborate on what the *Bulemu* programme does concerning imparting good morals and life skills in the young.

The impact of the Bulemu Character Building Programme

The "Bulemu" programme has resulted in low pregnancy levels and good academic and vocational performance among youths that have been through the programme. Generally it has contributed to increased appreciation for culture and the various ways it may improve livelihoods

among community members. One respondent indicated that:

By inculcating positive values in the youth such as humility, good morals, respect for others and hard work, the programme prepares the young to apply life's skills to solve society's problems and to take on greater responsibilities later in life, thus contributing to sustainable development.

Indigenous knowledge resources for sustainable development

Firstly, indigenous knowledge provided by the Institute for development include forum discussions which are held during the farming season to chart the way forward about various issues the farmers are facing, such as the best approach to time of planting based on the rain patterns, solutions to insect and termite problems and various other aspects of farming.

Secondly, the Institute also provides counselling on various traditional rituals such as those associated with puberty rites of passage, funerals and traditional Tonga marriages. Counselling is also provided concerning the way problems should be expressed and discussed in the marriage setting. The Institute is also open to consultation on various health related issues for individuals of all ages.

Thirdly, the Institute has indigenous knowledge resources available in different formats such as audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, books, radio programme and an online searchable database created in conjunction with the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR). The subject coverage of the developmental indigenous resources includes health care, agriculture, traditional heritage and culture, and traditional marriage and funeral rites.

Challenges encountered by the Institute

The major problems experienced by the Institute hinge around funding. Respondents indicated the hut that was serving as the clinic and other infrastructure needed to be refurbished from time to time to maintain them in good condition. It was also revealed the staffing was not adequate given the large communities served by the clinic and the equipment being used needed replacing. The Institute also needed a bigger place to hold the forum discussions. With increased funding the Institute would build better infrastructure, employ more staff and procure better equipment. This in turn would enable the Institute to reach out to more people in the outlying rural communities of Monze District.

Future application of indigenous knowledge

It was established that Indigenous knowledge can go a long way in bringing about development so long it is recognized, made a priority and adequately funded. Institute personnel were of the view that more research into indigenous knowledge should be conducted, and that findings be publicized in order to attract more funding, as many donors including the government would be made aware of the importance of the work being carried out by the Institute in contributing to national development.

Conclusion

As an indigenous knowledge system, Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute plays a very important role in the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of indigenous knowledge, thus ensuring its application to sustainable development. This study has revealed that the accumulated local knowledge, experiences, and natural resources in Monze District of Zambia are being applied in the agriculture, health, nutrition, family life and education in order to improve the lives of

surrounding communities. This demonstrates that the application of indigenous knowledge can bring about development in the country. No doubt all other rural communities all over Zambia have their own indigenous knowledge systems, which may be exploited and utilized to contribute to sustainable development of the nation. Indigenous knowledge thus definitely should be included among the priority development strategies in Zambia. This study has demonstrated the need to carry out further research in other parts of the country in order to find out other indigenous knowledge systems in the country that can be utilized to foster national development if they are not already doing so.

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