Preface

The genesis of this book was the various discussions with colleagues at conferences, symposia and workshops related to indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). The discussions identified a number of gaps related to social, cultural and educational aspects of indigenous knowledge (IK) in the context of developing countries. What further motivated the book is that when I was doing my postgraduate studies I learnt of the relevance of IK, but was frustrated by a lack of authoritative sources that were written by indigenous people for indigenous communities. Most of the literature that was available to us, about indigenous people, was intended to show how uncivilized, inferior and primitive the indigent was and how colonialism rescued them from their miserable life.

The imperial project was so determined to show that Africa was backward to the extent that the colonizers, with their sense of superiority and civilising mission, could not attribute the civilization of the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site (GZWHS) in Zimbabwe to the indigenous people. They wondered how “primitive” indigenous people of southern Africa were able to construct such a marvelous monument that is comparable to the pyramids of Egypt. Confronted by the contradiction that did not conform to their western stereotypes, they tried attributing the construction of GZWHS to the foreign knowledge the indigenous people might have gained as a result of some fictitious encounter with some Caucasian people. Many scholars, including Beach (1980) and Ngara (2016) have conclusively demonstrated that Great Zimbabwe was entirely a brainchild of the indigenous people.

The colonial literature seemed so not to have a good story to tell about indigenous communities which were regarded as inferior and unimaginative. The post-colonial literature continued to marginalize and neglect IK. The chapters in this book fill that lacuna from a critical indigenous perspective. The chapters are mainly written by indigenous scholars from an indigenous worldview. The chapters call for an integration of IK into the social fabric without romanticizing it.

The book will meet a need among policy makers, academicians, researchers, advanced-level students, and knowledge management and information professionals in developing countries who are interested in a text that articulate local contexts with global relevance. This book is useful in furthering their research exposure to pertinent topics in indigenous knowledge systems and assisting in furthering their own research efforts in this field.

This compilation of research on social, cultural, and educational issues in relation to IK continues a dialogue with previous debates on indigenous knowledge by bringing together original contributions from researchers from diverse contexts. The book is a scholarly peer-reviewed, edited book. Two scholars reviewed each chapter through a double-blind methodology, plus the editor and some members of the Advisory Editorial Board also reviewed each chapter. Staff at IGI Global also reviewed the content for grammar, writing-style and format.
Preface

Building on the existing literature, the objective of this book is to illuminate research on social, cultural, and educational issues in relation to IK in developing countries. As such, it explores the philosophy of “the return to the source” popularize by Cabral (1973). The philosophy calls for indigenous people to reflect on their ways of knowing before the advent of colonialism so that they tap on that wisdom in the conduct of their social cultural and educational activities, for example. We are not going into the debate of whether there was one “source” or multiple sources. That is the subject of chapter 1.

Although there is no acceptable definition of indigenous people, indigenous people represent five percent of the world’s population (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2008). The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2006) pointed out that it is more fruitful to identify rather than define indigenous people. There are many analytic lenses used to view indigeneity, but the framework provided by the United Nations is instructive:

*Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system.*

It is clear from the above framework that, among other things, indigenous people are a non-dominant group of society with:

- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and pre-settler societies;
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources;
- A distinct social, economic and legal system;
- Distinctive cultures, languages and beliefs; and
- A determination to maintain and reproduce their heritage as distinctive communities.

In as much as the framework delineates minimum determinants of indigenous people it also gives a basis of defining knowledge of the indigenous people. We define IK as tacit know-how that is community based, unique, dynamic, eclectic and transmitted from one generation to the next over time in various contexts (including cultural, ecological, economic, ethical, political, social, spiritual and technological) to support indigenous communities in solving problems and making decisions that are fundamental to their existence, survival and adaptation in their everyday direct interactions and transactions with their natural environment and system, the external world, and other worldviews and value systems in a particular geographical area. The definition is very lengthy because we attempted to include major characteristics that constitute an indigenous person and their knowledge.

The book consists of 21 chapters. The book is not written and structured according to systematic assumptions. The chapters can be read independently or together depending of relevance to a specific context. Many contributions underscore the need to holistically integrate IK in the social, cultural and activities of societies of developed nations where most indigenous people are found.

Chapter 1 presents the philosophical project of “the return to the source”. The project advocates a return to the traditional set up before indigenous people were colonized. There are three major problems with the project, including interpreting what the exact nature of that past was, working out how the traditional
mode can fit into the modern setup, and thirdly there is a possibility that more than one source existed in that pristine past. These problems pose major challenges to the project of the return to the source.

Chapter 2 discusses on a need of Southern African Development (SADC) states to harmonise policy and legal instruments for the protection of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in SADC. The problems related to the protection of IKS will remain unless there is a clear policy and legal basis to address it. A lack of protection of IKS is a major challenge that requires a regional approach.

Chapter 3 pushes the frontiers of knowledge production and raise consciousness of IKS as an essential strategy that can enable transformation and enhance intergenerational approaches to learning for all Africans. The lack of inclusion of IK that is produced through the daily interaction of African children within the home and their environment in African education systems has had a negative impact and is a threat to the beingness of Africans. African education systems and research can play a transformative constructive role in the revival of beingness and becoming an African person.

Chapter 4 emphasises the important role of IK in formal education systems. If formal education does not take appropriate account of IK, learners will not be able to connect their learning experiences with their social and cultural environment. In different countries, formal education has been shaped and dominated either by the majority population or by a ruling group and as a result is based on the respective groups’ epistemologies and ontologies as well as their language. This has led to a separation of IK from the type of knowledge mediated through formal education.

Chapter 5 demonstrates research and teaching activities in universities in southern Africa are entrenched within western theories and knowledge disciplines that are presented as neutral, universal and singular. The implication is that while we celebrate political independence we are still entrapped in continuing coloniality. That points to a need for reframing the curriculum to prioritise the interests of Africans. This chapter explores possible factors that contribute to the continued alienation of indigenous knowledges in southern African universities.

Chapter 6 reveals that western scientific knowledge on which the university curriculum in sub Saharan Africa (SSA) is mainly based has proved to be inadequate in addressing developmental challenges. Using the curriculum of library and information science (LIS) departments in Anglophone east and southern Africa (AESA) as a case study, the chapter discusses factors that influence the inclusion of IK in higher education in SSA.

Chapter 7 demonstrates that since the 1980s, IK has attracted the attention of a number of experts, including culturists, politicians and information scientists. The chapter discusses IK discourses in Africa, highlighting some of the significant trends and relationships among practitioners and scholars in the fields of culture, politics and information science that are driven by shared philosophies of IK.

Chapter 8 analyses the teaching of technology as a subject from an indigenous perspective and concludes that technology teaching should incorporate indigenous epistemologies. The chapter draws on various case studies to illustrate the point.

Using Cabral’s (1973) legendary practical wisdom to return to the source in the quest to broaden existing understanding of giftedness towards improving the education of gifted students, Chapter 9 examines indigenous conceptions of giftedness espoused in indigenous cultures of Zimbabwe. The chapter offers specific recommendations for educating highly able students including a Dynamic and Interactive Process Model of Talent development (DIPM) grounded in indigenous cultures of Zimbabwe currently generating interest in gifted education.
Chapter 10 applies Myers’ seven C’s model (2014) to determine how knowledge management (KM) may assist organizations in addressing challenges effectively. The findings demonstrate that Myers’s model (2014) has been successful in part in explaining the KM practices of indigenous organizations in these two countries. It is also difficult for indigenous organizations to motivate people to share knowledge because IK is individualized and used as a source of power, status and income in the communities. It is therefore important to promote integration of IK with other knowledge systems for socio-economic growth, and advocating change in institutional structures.

Chapter 11 assesses the extent to which environmental conditions for knowledge creation among curio makers that operated from the Matopos Hills National Park, supported competitiveness. The knowledge creation dimensions on intention, individual and group autonomy, fluctuation/creative chaos, information redundancy and requisite variety outlined in the Knowledge Creation Theory were used to provide a perspective for understanding the phenomena under study. Autonomy and some aspects on intention were found to be in existence. The dimension on information redundancy was missing and this was considered to be a cause of repetitions in designs that led to lack of a competitive edge.

Chapter 12 contributes to critical inquiry literature regarding various ways that IK intersects with technology, especially in regards to female knowledge systems (FKS). Using Lave and Wenger’s community of practice framework, this chapter illustrates how animations assist women in knowledge sharing on best practices in shea butter processing. Making use of state of the art technology, “Scientific Animations without Borders” (SAWBO) proposes a new approach to capture, preserve and share IK globally. Through this case study of shea producers, the authors examine how video animations provide a mechanism that amplifies traditional knowledge sharing through new technologies.

Chapter 13 discusses the ethical considerations that have to be observed in the preservation of IK following observations that there is no documented evidence of efforts in Zimbabwe to protect IK from unethical practices by researchers and companies as they tap and use the knowledge. The chapter brings to fore the importance of ethics with regards to research aimed at tapping and preserving IKS before the knowledge becomes extinct.

Chapter 14 documents the role played by culture centres and houses in the acquisition, preservation and dissemination of IK in a digital era in Zimbabwe. It states the ethical issues involved when acquiring, preserving and disseminating IK in the digital era. In Zimbabwe, it was noted that culture houses and centres do not have a web presence. However, there are challenges that are met by information specialists working in these culture houses and centres in the process of managing IK. These challenges are part of the ethical issues that should be considered in the production, access and use of IK.

Chapter 15 describes contested issues in development related to IK, and conventional development practice and theory. Drawing on findings from triangulated field research including interviews with farmers and agricultural experts (agronomists, livestock and agricultural input dealers), participant and field observations, focus group discussions, and soil sampling; this chapter argues that although development aims at improving the quality of life of people concerned, the understanding of such improved life quality is different between local people and development experts. Experts emphasize economic growth as measured by per capita income, which is sometimes inadequate in explaining local people’s understanding of development.
Chapter 16 discusses how IK is accessed and used by agricultural extension workers in Zimbabwe. The study reviews the relevant literature and focuses largely on Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge (IAK). The study utilises both quantitative and qualitative methods; a questionnaire was distributed and extension workers drawn from eight provinces of Zimbabwe. The study shows that IK is relevant in modern day agriculture and should be given sufficient attention in extension work.

Chapter 17 deals with why households in Chiwundura communal area continue to rely on traditional biomass such as fuel-wood for cooking purposes. The study established that fuel-wood was preferred to electricity because it made food tastier. The smoke that was produced from the fire was utilized to preserve food and seed. It was also used in protecting thatch from weevils. The traditional fireplace was also used for social cohesion as families sat around the fire in the evenings. However, the study established that the use of fuel-wood encouraged deforestation, climate change and indoor pollution that was associated with a number of ailments.

Chapter 18 presents the Akan heritage of indigenous food preservation as a strategy to manage postharvest losses and ensure food security and sustainable livelihoods. Akan communities use their indigenous knowledge and skills to preserve food and create jobs. In this era of Africa’s rebirth its people should utilize indigenous food processing skills to reduce postharvest losses and ensure food security. Government should provide financial support to make indigenous agro- industries sustainable.

Chapter 19 demonstrates that whilst old people’s homes (OPHs) were critical in caring for the destitute elderly in postcolonial Zimbabwe, inadvertently, they were undermining intergenerational cultural transfer. The study investigated the role of OPHs to establish the extent to which these institutions contribute to the discontinuity of intergenerational cultural transfer in Zimbabwe, especially among the Shona people. The study was informed by Gade’s (2011) theoretical framework of ‘narratives of return’. On that basis, a case was made for Zimbabwean society in general and the family in particular, to seriously reconsider its traditional and fundamental role of caring for the elderly without recourse to OPHs as an exigency.

Chapter 20 describes the extent to which the Ananseem oral tradition is still practiced among Ghanaians living outside the country, particularly Botswana and Ghana where the study was conducted. The findings reveal that although elders and storytellers were able to weave morals into children’s activities from a very young age, Ghanaians who were not raised speaking their native tongue find it difficult to relate to the messages woven deeply into the Ananse stories. Globalisation has reduced the importance Ghanaians attach to Ananse stories. There is a need for strategies to be put in place to resuscitate the oral story telling tradition of Ananseem.

Chapter 21 presents and reflects on selected Kalanga precolonial forms of identities and shows how these were used to (re) construct the Kalanga ethnic identity in colonial Zimbabwe. The chapter posits that Kalanga ethnicity is not a fixed, primordial phenomenon that has been in existence from time immemorial, but a dynamic and flexible identity that is tied to complex processes of identity formation spanning the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial epochs. The chapter acknowledges that Kalanga identities in pre-colonial Zimbabwean society were multiple, however, it mainly focuses on Kalanga religion (the Mwali/Ngwali Cult) and Kalanga language and demonstrates how these pre-colonial Kalanga forms of identities were later politicised and (re)interpreted and manipulated by colonialists, missionaries and Africans in an endeavour to construct Kalanga ethnic identity.

Finally, anyone conducting research on the social, educational and cultural aspects of IK in the context of developing nations will be heartened and inspired by this book. It offers guidance from the point of view of scholars who have themselves navigated the terrain.
REFERENCES


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