

Indigenous Knowledge as Local Response to Globalization and Climate Change in Nigeria/Africa

Geoffrey I. Nwaka
Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria

Paper presented at the International Conference of Public Policy – ICPP 3, held at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, June 28 - 30, 2017. My participation was funded by the UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence (UNDP/GCPSE) in Singapore

Context, and Policy Debates

- **Africa is still at the bottom of the global development ranking. Many of the Millennium Development Goals were not achieved in the continent because the root causes of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment have not been sufficiently understood and addressed. Are current development models and conventional wisdom appropriate for Africa?**

- **The worsening global economic and environmental crises, and widening inequalities between and within countries have exposed flaws in the Western, neo-liberal model of development imposed on Africa from the top by national governments and international development agencies**

- **The current approach to development in Africa can be likened to building a house from the roof down:
“All the institutions of modernization are in place – the banks, the factories, the legal systems, the unions, etc; but all these appear to be suspended over societies that have no firm connection to them, and whose indigenous institutions, even when oriented in the right direction, lack the necessary scaffolding to connect them to their modern surrogates “**

- **As we now consider an African approach to achieving the post-2015 SDGs, indigenous knowledge may prove to be “ the single largest knowledge resource not yet mobilized in the development enterprise”.**

Alternative Models and the Indigenous Knowledge Movement:

- **Indigenous knowledge is used here to refer to the vast and largely undocumented body of knowledge, wisdom, skills and expertise which a given community has developed over time, and continues to develop as it grapples with the challenges of its environment, with outside ideas, and with constantly changing conditions.**
- **Marshal Sahlins has emphasized the need for all peoples “to indigenize the forces of global modernity, and turn them to their own ends” as the real impact of globalization depends on the responses developed at the local level; cf the process of enculturation in the Catholic Church in Nigeria**
- **Mamadou Dia: blames state failure and the development crisis in Africa on “the structural disconnection between formal institutions transplanted from outside and indigenous institutions born of traditional African cultures”. The need to econcile the traditional and the modern.**
- **Claude Ake: „Building on the indigenous“ in relation to developent assistance**
- **Peter Eke: The two Publics“ – the civic (associated with colonial modernity) and the primordial. Colonial modernity alienating; Achebe’s novels**
- **UNESCO: Creative diversity; Dialogue among civilizations; and other blueprints by other international organization**
- **World Bank: Indigenous knowledge: Local Pathways to Global Development**

Critique of the Colonial State and Colonial Modernity in Africa

African independence go beyond the mere Africanisation of the personnel that man the structures and institutions inherited from colonial rule as gatekeepers of the colonial heritate. The more fundamental philosophical and epistemological dimensions of independence require more attention: shift of focus from European/Empire history to African history; African literature etc

- **How can we use indigenous knowledge to promote good governance, agricultural and natural resource management, climate change adaptation, etc in Africa in away that is compatible with local conditions and priorities? Compare Africa's approach to development with the Asian approach.**
- **Research and studies now examining**
 - **Indigenous knowledge (IKS) and good governance; role of traditional rulers, institutions and other informal organizations of civil society**
 - **IKS and agricultural and natural resource management**
 - **IKS and traditional medicine and health care (Ebola scare and cure?)**
 - **IKS and law/judicial reforms; ADR, Gacaca courts**
 - **IKS, language and curriculum reform.**

Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Change:

- **Although poverty and need for survival may sometimes force people to use resources unsustainably, most African societies have deeply entrenched ideas about environmental protection and sustainability because their livelihood depends on the land and the stability of the ecosystem. They have deeply entrenched ideas about environmental protection and sustainability. They believe that “land belongs to the vast family of whom many are dead, a few are living, and countless hosts are yet unborn”, that is, in stewardship for future generations.**
- **They have fairly sophisticated ideas about adaptation to change in climate**
 - **weather forecasting**
 - **techniques for soil conservation/management and erosion control**
 - **pest and disease control for crops and animals**
 - **change in farming calendar as climate adaptation**
 - **changes in the pattern of migration of birds, dry and rainy seasons, fruiting, etc**
- **Implications for development assistance**

Using Local Knowledge to Complement Global Science

- **With globalization and growing global interdependence, Africa cannot now opt for an insular and entirely home grown approach to its development, but must seek to benefit from international best practices, and follow the path of development which recognizes the merits and limitations of both local knowledge and global science, and explore how the two can best complement each other.**
- **Development agents, researchers and donors, who often assume a knowledge or capacity vacuum in Africa should instead try to tap into the vast resource of indigenous knowledge for locally appropriate ways to achieve participatory and sustainable development .**
- **The indigenous knowledge movement is an appropriate local response to globalization and Western knowledge dominance, and offers a way to promote inter-cultural dialogue for endogenous and sustainable development in Africa.**

Some References

- **Nwaka, Geoffrey, 2007, Indigenous Knowledge, Local Governance and Community Development in Nigeria, in Mariana C Jakob, ed. *Community Development: Local and Global Challenges*, Hochschule, LUZERN, Switzerland, pp. 49-55**
- **Nwaka, Geoffrey, 2008, Using Indigenous Knowledge, in Micjhel S de Vries et al, eds. *Improving Local Government – Outcomes of Comparative Research*, Palgrave/Macmillan, New York. Pp. 72 – 87**
- **Nwaka, Geoffrey, 2009, Using Indigenous Knowledge to Strengthen Local Governance and Development in Nigeria, in A Amuwo et al, eds. *Civil Society, Governance and Regional Integration in Africa*, DPMA/UNECA, Nairobi, pp141 – 157.**

•

●

Thank You