

Institute of Indigenous Knowledge (IIK): Options for food security through diversity

Anke Weisheit

Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), P. O. Box 1410 Mbarara, Uganda

Corresponding author: ankeweisheit@web.de; ankweis@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper describes the rationale and approaches used to establish an Institute of Indigenous Knowledge in Uganda. The process involved a four year process including internship with local herbalists in Uganda.

Key words: Indigenous knowledge, Mbarara, Uganda

Résumé

Cet article décrit la raison d'être et les approches utilisées pour implanter un Institut des connaissances indigènes en Ouganda. Le processus a impliqué un processus de quatre ans, incluant le stage avec des herboristes locaux en Ouganda.

Mots clés: Connaissances indigènes, Mbarara, Ouganda

Background

Indigenous knowledge technologies and science are the root source and now contributing to the development of a wide range of fields like Agriculture, Food Science, Health, Social Sciences, Construction, and Engineering. Centres of Excellence in the integration of indigenous knowledge are few. Such centres would contribute greatly to the understanding of the vast traditional agricultural systems and finding methods to transform them to reach a wider development impact. The Institute of Indigenous Knowledge (IIK) concept is based on repeated request for support from various traditional herbalists associations in western Uganda where the author was working. The main idea behind was to build a permanent initiative for integration of indigenous knowledge in research, training and development intervention in Uganda and beyond. The author realised the challenges time bound project interventions has, especially in the field of indigenous knowledge, which needs complex, multidisciplinary and long term interventions to have success.

To respond to these challenges the idea is to enhance the universities' role of community relevance of science, by adding a discipline to the range of universities research and teaching namely the studies of indigenous systems, science and

technologies for development. The concept is an attempt to present a model Institute of Indigenous Knowledge to provide a basis for discussion to this group and beyond. This is envisioned as one of the possible pathways to transform agricultural knowledge into development impact.

The Institute will cover a wide range of areas including; Agriculture, Food Science, Biodiversity Conservation, Health, Social Sciences and Engineering. The objectives of the Institute are:

- To develop curricula and teach indigenous knowledge technologies and science in medicine, social science and agriculture as the subject at university level,
- To document, achieve, validate and disseminate indigenous knowledge,
- To develop theoretical and methodological paradigms within which to understand the specific characteristics of indigenous knowledge systems,
- Develop academic and community level research capacity in the various field of Indigenous Knowledge Systems,
- To foster and provide the interface with other systems of knowledge,
- To fund raise for IK related research, training, innovation incubation, industrial development, partnerships, and
- To generate income option for communities and industries using IK systems for innovative products and services.

Methodology/ Approach

A capacity building and development needs assessment was carried out following two different working experiences. The first was during 3 years of intensive project work and living with traditional healers (participant observation) during the years 2003 and 2004 at Rukararwe Partnership Workshop for Rural Development. The second was during project implementation at Lake Bunyonyi. The assessment employed participatory processes and ranking. The Concept was then developed as a draft and submitted to the Vice Chancellor of Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) as an innovation of the author in 2006. Subsequently in 2007 the Vice Chancellor constituted a Taskforce of 8 members, consisting of representative from all faculties and institutes, to build on the concept. During the proposal development the document was shared among indigenous knowledge base associations, key subject matter specialists as well as presented to international conferences for comments. During this international consultation

**Proposed Key
Focuses of the
Institute**

process the Proposal was refined and submitted to the University Council for approval.

The Institute of Indigenous Knowledge will have various departments starting with Medicine, Social Science and Agriculture-Food Technology on the following key thematic areas:

- Develop course units for educating students IKS in development, medicine and education as an introductory course,
- Develop and conduct education and training programmes and design curriculum materials on indigenous knowledge for inclusion in the curricula of formal schools and for use by extension and other development workers,
- Strengthen and consolidate IK training resources, and provide training and technical assistance to practitioners, developers and researchers,
- Community outreach for Knowledge Sharing and dissemination, and
- Conducting summer schools and international student and staff exchange.

**Research
Development and
Utilisation**

- Conduct inter-disciplinary research on indigenous knowledge systems,
- Initiate a long-term efforts to promote and utilise indigenous knowledge for social, economic, cultural and educational development and conservation,
- Conduct research on the transfer and up scaling of indigenous knowledge and innovations, approaches and technologies from one area to another,
- Integration of IK in the various professional fields (Medicine, Agriculture, Biodiversity Conservation, Art & Crafts, Social Services, Business Studies),
- Mainstreaming appropriate Indigenous Knowledge related approaches into the national and regional development plans,
- To develop appropriate systems for validating the safety, efficacy and applicability of IK technologies in research training and development,
- Policy research on intellectual property, equitable benefits sharing and information transfer systems, and
- To adopt IK technologies for appropriate technology transfer and commercialisation processes of structures for the equitable and fair utilisation of IK innovations.

Collection, documentation and dissemination:

- Indigenous knowledge that has been passed from generation to generation by word of mouth will slowly cease to exist unless it is formally documented and preserved. Therefore, it is planned to document and facilitate easy access to indigenous knowledge so that those interested could familiarize themselves with it,
- The Institute will act as a clearinghouse for collecting, documenting, preserving and disseminating information on indigenous knowledge systems of various communities in Uganda,
- Publicize IK activities and services through publications, exhibitions, youth contests, workshops and conferences, host a museum for conservation and exhibition of traditional Ugandan life and art /crafts for promoting of the expression of culture and income generating activities.

Results

The MUST Council (highest decision making body at University level) agreed to the proposal to establish the Institute of Indigenous Knowledge in March 2011. The plan is now integrated in the master plan of the University and has been allocated funds in the 2012/2013 financial year budget.

Discussion and Conclusion

The IK Institute concept is a viable concept to integrate Indigenous Knowledge in research, training and development interventions. Its departments will tackle issues from various angles; i.e., medicine, science, social science, agriculture and food science. The research will contribute to diversification of options and approaches to contribute to *“feeding 1 billion in Africa in a changing world”*.

A general version of the key aspects of the institute concept is availed online under the name HEKIMA (meaning Wisdom in Kiswahili) at <http://www.agricult.org/Anke_Weisheit_IKS_Hekima.pdf>. It has also been shared through conferences. Contacts for future adoption and implementation have also been made. The author of this paper is willing to speak and or present posters about the concept at international conferences and other professional gatherings. Furthermore the author is willing to be the vision driver to facilitate local teams at institutions who have interest of establishing a similar institute within Africa and beyond. Two other Universities, one in Uganda and one in Nigeria have already expressed interest in realising this concept at their institutions.

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