Managing Indigenous Knowledge in Tanzania: A Business Perspective

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Chapter 12
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A Business Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the integration of a business perspective in the management of indigenous knowledge (IK). Indigenous knowledge existed among the diverse societies in Tanzania since the beginning of life in such societies. With a business perspective it is considered that IK will be properly managed as the IK owners will be rewarded with some benefits for engaging in such business. Therefore, this chapter is designed to help readers understand: the status quo of managing IK in Tanzania; the applicability of the business perspective to the management of IK; the impacts of the business perspective in the management and development of IK; and the roles of stakeholders (IK owners and the government) in managing IK as a business enterprise. Thus, a business perspective for the management of such knowledge as a major source of development in this era of the knowledge economy is highly recommended for the appreciation revival of such knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge (IK) has now become an important issue for research, teaching and discussion in different forums and conferences. History books (including Rodney's (1972) book on how Europe contributed to the underdevelopment of Africa) show that before colonisation of the African continent, African societies including societies in Tanzania had their local knowledge systems, which sustained the indigenous population in almost all aspects of life. The indigenous people in various societies had diverse knowledge and skills to master their surroundings and solve various problems as these occurred. The sustainable practices of IK enables indigenous people to preserve their identity while allowing them

to exploit the available opportunities; and bring about human development. The IK is sometimes used as a tool to fight poverty and conserve the environment (Msuya, 2007; Caldwell, 2007; Gosh & Sahoo, 2011). This knowledge and skills includes the art of iron smelting, mining techniques, hunting methods, agricultural techniques (including plant and animal breeding), general arts and crafts as well as oral literature, song and dance (Chavunduka, 1994). A substantial amount of these skills and knowledge is still available and used by traditional communities normally residing in rural areas.

Today, there is increased use and demand for IK products and services, as well as debates, conferences and workshops on the management of IK. This environment has made a business perspective important for IK management, with research to strive to improve the IK products and services, and the sustainability of such knowledge. Similarly, a business perspective for the management of IK is assumed to be the remedy to the sustainable management of such knowledge. Thus the perspective functions as an innovative strategy in the management of IK because it helps to shifting people's attention from stigmatising the IK to managing it properly as a substantive business. Consequently, it is a foregone conclusion that the integration of a business perspective in the management of IK is significant to the achievement of IK management goals. Hence, with this conclusion there is a need for greater infusion of business perspectives into the management of IK for sustainability as people who own such knowledge will expect to create a profit from the knowledge which they possess.

To help our readers properly understand the focus of this chapter, definitions of the related concepts and scope of IK have been provided. The purposes for managing such knowledge as well as the status quo of the management of IK in Tanzania have been explained. In this chapter, we have also highlighted the significance of managing such knowledge with a business focus. This helps with understanding why and how Tanzania should properly manage IK while eliminating the persistent state of stigmatisation of IK as reflected by the colonialism era (Rodney, 1972; Hassim, Heywood, & Berger, 2007, p. 204; Kurwijila, 2004, p. 16; Iwata, 2015;). As stated earlier, IK has now captured attention in academia, economics, development and other related fields. Thus a theoretical understanding of the management process of IK with a business focus on Tanzania and in other countries is vital for the management of such knowledge for socio-economic development.

The Concept of Indigenous Knowledge

Various scholars have defined IK differently based on their different contexts and perspectives. It is the experience of the authors of this chapter that some definitions have confused IK with witchcraft and lack of education of Africa's indigenous people. It is however argued that such views carry elements of a colonial mentality implanted by colonialists of the elite schools of the past. Colonialists did this intentionally in order to supress African culture and traditions, so to make Africans feel inferior and reduce competition between the goods made using African IK against theirs (Rodney, 1972; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2010; Frankema & van Waijenburg, 2011). However, it is important to note that it is not the authors' intention to deny witchcraft in the collective concepts of IK but rather that indigenous knowledge should not be defined as witchcraft. This is because the collective concepts of IK include many other IK systems (as mentioned earlier) of which witchcraft is a part.

The following are some of the IK definitions from different scholars. Grenier (1998) defines indigenous knowledge as a type of knowledge that exists within and is developed around the specific conditions of humans, indigenous to particular geographic areas. Therefore, such knowledge encompasses vari-

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