

# IK Notes

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## Indigenous Knowledge for Development Program *Two Years Down the Road*

KNOWLEDGE AS A VEHICLE FOR DEVELOPMENT IS UNDER-USED. In the past, most African nations adopted economic policies with a view to modernizing society and transforming the productive sectors. Indigenous knowledge that could have supported this process, or in some cases, offered an alternative perspective, was often relegated to the backwaters. However, the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, through the notion of sustainable development, catapulted these practices to the forefront of the development discourse. Policymakers worldwide, through conferences and workshops, have begun to highlight the critical role of indigenous knowledge in the development process. The first of these was the Global Knowledge Conference held in Toronto in June 1997.

Under the auspices of the Partnership for Information and Communication Technology for Africa (PICTA), the World Bank was encouraged to lead the Indigenous Knowledge (IK) for Development Initiative in collaboration with other organizations such as UNESCO, ITU and WIPO. The Initiative aims to facilitate a multilateral dialogue between indigenous communities, NGOs, governments, civil society and the private sector. The objective is to mainstream indigenous knowledge into development activities and optimize the benefits of development assistance, especially to the poor. The Bank adopted a framework for action, which is being implemented in conjunction with its partner organizations.

Two years down the road, its time to review the Bank's progress in achieving these goals. Has the IK Development Initiative been effective in disseminating information; facilitating information exchange among developing communities; applying Indigenous Knowledge in the development process; establishing partnerships?

### Disseminating information

Since its inception, the initiative has developed a database of indigenous knowledge and practices with over 100 case studies on the web. Each one draws upon the lessons learned from the experiences of a particular community in dealing with an aspect of development. The case studies are not meant to be a repository of knowledge, but a referral database on IK. They cover a wide range of activities—including indigenous financial practices among farming communities in Nige-

*IK Notes* reports periodically on Indigenous Knowledge (IK) initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is published by the Africa Region's Knowledge and Learning Center as part of an evolving IK partnership between the World Bank, communities, NGOs, development institutions and multilateral organizations. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the World Bank Group or its partners in this initiative. A webpage on IK is available at <http://www.worldbank.org/aftdr/ik/default.htm>

IK Practice No: 12  
 Country: NIGERIA  
 Domain: Rural Finance  
 Technology: Savings and Loans  
 Application: Indigenous financial practices among farming communities

Summary: Farming communities in Nigeria have developed various systems of saving and lending. Normally farmers would form savings associations with an emphasis on savings and access to the resources on a rotational basis. Some of the associations would formulate regulations and by-laws while the majority has strong but undocumented formal rules and regulations. Once a member, saving is compulsory and expected on a regular basis, usually related to market days. The loans are used for non-consumables, but also for payment of school fees or farm labor. Repayment is ensured through social control. Usually members do not receive interest on deposits, loans are granted on favorable terms. No mention is made of dealing with defaulters; it is assumed that social control is sufficient to ensure a sustainable S/L association. However, the savings base is too small for accumulation or for credits to finance major investments. So far there has been little recognition by the formal credit institutions of the existing indigenous financial practices.

Lesson: Existing indigenous rural savings and loan associations are yet to be recognized by the formal credit sector. Collaboration on an equitable basis would increase the impact of formal institutions and increase the investment potential in rural areas.

Source: Nweze, N.J. *IK Monitor* 2(2) August 1994

External Link: [IK Monitor](#)

ria, AIDs prevention through involving traditional healers in awareness campaigns, reintroducing local architecture in Egypt, common water resource management in Burkina Faso, and indigenous healing of war-affected children elsewhere in Africa.

The range and complexity of subjects that can be effectively dealt with through the application of indigenous knowledge and practices are being documented in a series of IK Notes. These are published electronically and in print in three languages, reaching over 20,000 readers. Each of the 19 IK Notes to date explores in some detail sensitive issues, such as female circumcision, and describes locally driven solutions. These range from the efforts of indigenous women's NGOs that have successfully campaigned against such practices to lobbying the government to introduce new laws. Each case reinforces the success of a bottom-up approach to develop-

ment. In cases, where international agencies such as Unicef have assisted, they have merely provided backup support via financial assistance and international recognition. In each case, the initiative is always "home grown" and locally owned. This has in turn strengthened local institutions and led to some cutting edge work in areas such as education and Koranic literacy in West Africa.

The IK Notes have shown that "individuals without any formal education, from villages with minimal resources, can improve their lives and environment through a solid program leading to greater autonomy and self sufficiency". These success stories endorse the universality of indigenous knowledge, which can play a key role in the process of empowering local communities, at the regional, national and global level.

### Facilitating exchange

The World Bank has supported eight IK Resource Centers in Africa, by improving their capacity to share information. This has taken many forms. In Cameroon, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, the project facilitated the capturing of IK through stimulating research into IK practices by local centers. In Burkina Faso and Uganda, the project improved the connectivity and networking capacity of local telecommunications. As a result, rural community Telecenters are now being used to obtain information from local communities and disseminate the knowledge generated to other regions.

### *Applying Indigenous Knowledge*

One of the greatest achievements of the IK Initiative has been its initial success in mainstreaming the use of IK in development programs and projects. It supported Uganda in formulating a national policy on IK, Ghana in the use of IK to improve agricultural practices, Burkina Faso in highlighting the role of traditional hunters in natural resource management. In July 1999, the Bank initiated a study in collaboration with UNCTD to explore the diversity of IK in Uganda in relation to agriculture, health sciences and technology. This formed the basis of a national strategy that would include all the stakeholders, from indigenous healers to civil society, as well as policy makers.

Six months later, a national workshop involving these key players was held to draft a national strategy and framework for action. This was the genesis of the Kampala Declaration on IK for sustainable development. The Declaration urges the government to support the development of IK and planners to include IK in the national planning process. This is being implemented in several ways, such as including IK into Uganda's Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF), led by the Ministry of Planning. This is a joint partnership between donors and governments aimed at accelerating the pace of growth in Africa. In Uganda, one of the goals is raising agricultural productivity. The IK Initiative has played a facilitating role by establishing a Steering Committee to monitor the implementation process and a Secretariat to coordinate activities specifically related to IK.

The IK Initiative is moving beyond policy making into project management. It has begun advising the Ugandan National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) on the use of IK in Bank supported Agriculture, Research and Training Projects (ARTP). The second phase of the ongoing ARTP (II) project is aimed at supporting long term technology development and dissemination. The IK Initiative's role is to provide the methodological input to transfer relevant technologies and IK and improved cultural practices to farmers' fields and promote their adoption. Examples of such practices include the improved cultural management of *Matoke* to reduce the harmful effects of the *Sigatoka* disease and small farm implements designed for the smaller cattle of Uganda such as the improved Ugandan plow. Although, the project is still in its infancy, it is hoped that its success can be used to mainstream and replicate the use of IK in the development of new projects.

### Establishing partnerships

The project has expanded its support base by establishing close partnerships with several development organizations, NGOs and IK Centers. More than 75% of the best practices disseminated on the web were provided by these partners. The initiative is growing beyond PICTA members. It has for instance, begun to work with WIPO to address the intellectual property rights aspect of IK. At the grass roots, the Initia-

tive has begun to engage local communities and learn from their experiences. By supporting NGOs and institutions such as UNCST, the Bank has played an enabling role in bringing together traditional healers, academics, ministers, civil society and the church. As a result, indigenous organizations such as Traditional Herbalists Associations are able to pursue a two-way dialogue, with government institutions on a level playing field. By creating channels for local communities to voice their concerns at the regional and international level, the project has made significant progress towards mainstreaming IK into the development process in Africa.

### Next steps

The challenges ahead include-

- intensified efforts to mainstream IK into the development process
- greater donor involvement and active participation
- facilitating interactive exchanges through establishing communities of practice (through various fora e.g. Development Marketplace)
- forming local alliances around topics such as IPRs to facilitate enablement and empowerment.

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# IK Notes

would be of interest to:

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