Abstract Number: T03P05-01

Panel

T03P05 - Complexity and the Politics of Knowledge Policies: Multi-issue, Multi-level and Multi-actor

Author

Professor Geoffrey Nwaka, Professor of History, Abia State University Uturu Nigeria, Africa

Title

Using Indigenous Knowledge to Counter Western Knowledge Dominance in Africa

Abstract

Until recently Eurocentric scholars like the late Trevor-Roper doubted if Africa had a history worthy of study. African customs and traditions have also been misconceived as irrational and incompatible with the conventional strategies of development. But the current global economic and environmental crises, and widening inequalities between and within national have exposed flaws in the Western, neo-liberal model of development imposed on Africa from the top. There is now renewed interest in an alternative approach which emphasizes the cultural dimension of development, and the overlooked potential of indigenous knowledge as perhaps “the single largest knowledge resource not yet mobilized in the development enterprise”. Marshall 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 largely on the responses developed at the local level. The challenge for Africa is how to engage and cope with globalization and other external influences in a way that is compatible with local conditions and priorities; how the full weight of traditional norms, values and institutions can be brought to bear on public affairs and development practice.

The paper examines how indigenous knowledge and local traditions can be used to reconstruct African history and to support good governance and endogenous development in Africa. Indigenous knowledge is used here to refer to the vast and largely undocumented body of knowledge, wisdom, skills and expertise developed in African societies over time; the heritage of creative thought and practical everyday life passed on orally or through experience from one generation to the next. The paper argues that African independence should go beyond the mere Africanization of the
personnel that man our modern services and institutions as gate-keepers of the colonial heritage. The more fundamental philosophical and epistemological dimensions of independence and indigenization which would fully document, review and enlist indigenous knowledge for locally appropriate thinking and development has not received the attention it deserves. Africa may already have moved too far with global modernity to contemplate an insular and entirely home grown approach to its development, but indigenous knowledge offers a model for rethinking and redirecting the development process, and a way to involve, enable and empower local actors to take part in their own development. Researchers and development agents who often assume a knowledge or capacity vacuum in Africa should instead try to tap into this vital resource of indigenous knowledge for locally appropriate ways to achieve genuine and sustainable development. The paper concludes with some general reflections on the indigenous knowledge movement as an appropriate local response to globalization and Western knowledge dominance, and as a way to promote cultural identity and inter-cultural dialogue in African development.

Reference


Keyword

Indigenous knowledge, Epistemic justice, Globalization, African identity