

Viability of indigenous knowledge and skills in women economic empowerment: A case study of the Great Zimbabwe craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area of Masvingo District

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Abstract

The study explores the economic viability of indigenous knowledge and skills in craft in women empowerment at Great Zimbabwe craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area of Masvingo District. Increasing attention has been given to indigenous knowledge in craft in third World communities as a potential basis for economic empowerment for women. The study used the convenient sample of 30 craft women and 30 women graduate teachers in Masvingo District. The study compared the income derived from indigenous knowledge and skills in craft in women with that of their counter-parts graduate teachers in the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture. The comparative study adopted by the study seeks to determine the economic viability of indigenous knowledge and skills in women in craft business. Findings from this study indicated that the women with indigenous knowledge and skills surpass their counter-part graduate teachers in income earnings per month, have better access to foreign currency and high skills for surviving in harsh economic conditions. From these findings, the study recommends the incorporation of such indigenous knowledge and skills in craft into formal education system so as to develop and preserve the knowledge, develop new technologies and provide self employment avenues.

Key words: indigenous knowledge, women empowerment, skills, economic empowerment, craft.

1. Background to the study

According to Mundy and Compton (1991) women play a leading role in generating new wealth and their empowerment must be less about running poultry or sewing projects, and more about clearing away the obstacles that exclude women from opportunity. Empowering women to create new wealth requires a solid foundation that rests on educational opportunities, sound government policies, and access to financial resources. Empowerment is ensuring ownership, capacity building, management, and control of diverse spheres of the economy, including manufacturing in craft, insurance, construction, and transportation. Tapping into existing expertise in these fields, harnessing talent, and forming structures that can lobby and access capital are the best ways to create greater participation in the economy.

Women form 51 percent of the population (Posey 1991) and 47 percent of that number is in the rural areas. As a developing country we need to see more development in the rural areas. It is the desire of every nation and in particular the developing nation like Zimbabwe to see to it that the large chunk of the women are involved in the economic affairs of the country through active involvement and participation. The reason behind being that the women constitutes the largest percentage of the entire population of the country.

A strong argument has been made from the times of Nyerere that development dictated from outside rather than anchored in the knowledge base of the local population is in principle modernisation disguised. It will not be fully concerned with the local needs and desires. While it is true that globalisation forces may be realised in uniquely local forms (Posey 1991), it is also true that western-oriented development in developing countries is always haunted by its own ghost, underdevelopment. This is evidenced by continued marginalisation of the already marginalised sector of the population, the women but this sector of the population can have a contribution to the general economic development and growth of the country.

The value and relevance of the indigenous knowledge, local technology, know-how and practices is central in the framework of the Convention (article 17, 18, 19) of the United Nation Charter. Traditional knowledge consists of the practical and normative knowledge about the ecological, socio-economic and cultural environment which is passed on from one generation to the other. It is usually believed that traditional knowledge is centred (generated and transmitted by people as knowledgeable, competent and entitled actors), transmitted from one generation to the next (Posey 1991) and culturally valorised. This type of knowledge

promotes diversity as it valorises and reproduces the local resources. This is exactly what the locals of the Chief Mugabe's area do at the Great Zimbabwe Craft Centre. The women at the craft centre transform the local resources into finished products that they somehow export to the international world in the form of tourists who visit the famous Great Zimbabwe Monument.

The provisions of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (Mundy and Compton 1991) argue that the traditional knowledge is a range of technologies and techniques which could be harnessed to manage underdevelopment challenges. In this case the indigenous knowledge can be used as leverage for the improvement of women in the economy through participation in the transformation of the local resources into finished goods. This can experience an inflow of foreign currency (Dumbu and Musingafi 2010) into the country especially in times of great need like the 2007-2008 economic melt-down in Zimbabwe. Most of the women at the craft centre enjoyed some chunk of foreign currency which they obtained from the sale of the craft artifacts at the Great Zimbabwe Craft centre. This becomes a livelihood for the women in the local surrounding environment. The benefits of the traditional knowledge relate to the identification of poverty reduction measures in the women population, thus empowering them economically just like their male counterparts. The positive externality (Dumbu and Musingafi 2010) that emerges from the empowerment of the women through the use of indigenous knowledge is the ultimate growth of the local community economically leading to the improved standards of living of the women and their families.

2. Objectives of the study

The study explored the economic viability of the indigenous knowledge and skills in craft in women empowerment at the Great Zimbabwe Craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area and make a comparison of the incomes they earn from such traditionally transmitted skills and the counterpart women in the public sector (Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture) in the Masvingo District of Masvingo province.

3. Statement of the problem

As knowledge becomes increasingly important to the indigenous quest for self-determination, cultural survival and economic empowerment the concept of economic viability of the women, of the indigenous knowledge systems takes centre stage. Women play a leading role in generating new wealth and their empowerment must be less about running poultry or sewing projects, and more about clearing away the obstacles that exclude women from opportunity. Empowering women to create new wealth requires a solid foundation that rests on educational opportunities, sound government policies, and access to financial resources. Women form 51 percent of the population and 47 percent of that number is in the rural areas. As a developing country we need to see more development in the rural areas. It is the desire of every nation and in particular the developing nation like Zimbabwe to see to it that the large chunk of the women are involved in the economic affairs of the country through active involvement and participation. The reasons behind being that the women constitute the largest percentage of the entire population of the country. Thus the problem can be stated as, "What is the economic viability of the indigenous knowledge systems in craft in women empowerment."

4. Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What is the economic viability of the of indigenous knowledge skills in the empowerment of women in craft business?
- Does the craft business really empower the women more than their counterpart women in the ministry of Education, Art, Sport and Culture in Masvingo District?

5. Significance of the study

This study will help the Government and policy makers in Zimbabwe to include craft education into the curriculum in order to empower the women who form the majority of the population in the country. The study intends to establish the strategies that can be employed to conserve the traditional knowledge on craft. As knowledge becomes increasingly important the quest for indigenous knowledge for self determination is also growing at an alarming rate compelling the prosperity of the indigenous knowledge preservation in the country and in Masvingo District in particular. The study intends to equip the Ministry of Education Arts, Sport and Culture with the strategies to include the view of craft skills that are passed from generation to generation into the higher education curriculum for the purpose of empowering the female in the economic emancipation in the modern world. The women in both the craft sector and their counterparts in the Ministry of Education, Art, Sport and Culture will benefit from the study through development of skills that are necessary for livelihood of the women because empowerment of the women pose positive externalities to the country in terms of economic development.

6. Conceptual framework: Indigenous Knowledge System

According to Matowanyika (1995) indigenous knowledge systems are localised African systems developed over a long period of time and whose patterns are based upon local knowledge systems and expressed by local economic activities. In most cases in the world and in Zimbabwe, indigenous knowledge systems are always in balance with local environmental economic resources that are at the disposal of community exploitation for the benefit of the economic development of the local communities. It is the generation and passing of the knowledge and skills passed and preserved by those who receive it for the benefit of the community at large. The indigenous knowledge systems are influenced from within, from other indigenous systems and from national and international systems (Oguamanam 2010).

Warren et al (1995) argue that indigenous knowledge systems is knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society as contrasted to international knowledge that is generated through universities and research institutions. It is vital knowledge for the development of the economies that are still at their infant stages of development (Dumbu and Musingafi, 2010), for the facilitation of the transmission of information from one generation to the other in a preserved manner. In pre- colonial Zimbabwe, the widespread and productive use of indigenous knowledge systems reflected itself in such industries such as craft, mining, agriculture and other industries. The study intends to establish the extent to which the indigenous knowledge systems have been redeployed after a period of dominance and devaluation (Dumbu and Musingafi, 2010), as women try to cope up with their day to day existential challenges in the midst of economic turmoil.

There are several terms that are subjected to the term indigenous knowledge system like traditional knowledge or local knowledge. All these terms suggest the source of the knowledge and how it is imparted to the next generation. This is knowledge that has a long standing traditional practice of certain regional, indigenous or local communities. It is knowledge that encompasses the wisdom, knowledge and teachings of these communities leading to existential skills passed on from generation to the next generation. The indigenous knowledge systems typically distinguish one community from another (Flavier et al 1995). Indigenous knowledge is basically the local knowledge that is used by the society to interact with the local environment for the purposes of economic emancipation. It the knowledge, that facilitates communication and economic decision making. Indigenous knowledge systems are dynamic and are continually influenced by internal creativity and experimentation as well as by contact with external systems (Flavier et al 1995).

What should be noted at this point in time is that sophisticated knowledge of the natural world is not confined to science alone (Nakashima, Prott and Bridgewater 2000). Human societies across the globe have developed rich sets of experience in the transformation of locally available resources into finished products that are having high demand on the international market. The relationship between the indigenous knowledge systems and the existentiality of the local community is of great importance as far as economic empowerment of the women is concerned because the women form the largest portion of the global population. The indigenous knowledge systems today encompass an array of information, understanding and interpretations that guide human societies around the globe in their innumerable interactions with the natural milieu, be it in craft, animal husbandry or hunting.

Indigenous people have broad knowledge of how to live sustainably. However, formal education systems have disrupted the practical everyday life aspects of indigenous knowledge and ways of learning, replacing them with abstract knowledge and academic way of learning that has swallowed a chunk of women in Zimbabwe and disregarding the indigenous knowledge skills in craft as a livelihood. There is grave risk in today's woman that many of them might be at the verge of dislodging the indigenous knowledge skills that have been imparted to them traditional going for formal employment because they have obtained a formal education. This goes with the women in practice loosing the valuable knowledge about ways of living sustainably.

7. Research methodology

The study used a descriptive survey design. The questionnaire used had both closed and open-ended sections that yielded qualitative data. Babbie (1997) says, "Descriptive survey is a method of research that describes what we see over and beyond". Thus the researchers chose this method as it allowed both the women in craft and their counterparts in Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture to say exactly what they felt about the viability of the indigenous knowledge on the empowerment of women in craft and those formally employed by the government ministry. Borg and Gall (1989) say descriptive surveys are excellent vehicles for the measurement of attitudes and orientations prevalent in a large population as was the case in this study. One of the characteristics of the descriptive survey method is to investigate the present status of the phenomenon. This was the primary goal of this study. The study also employed the comparative research design aimed at comparing earnings by the women in craft and those employed by a government ministry. Hantrais (1995) argue that comparative study have been used in studies to identify, analyse and explain similarities and differences across sections of the population.

7.1 Population of the study

The target population for this study was all the 80 women with registered stands for the display of craft artifacts at the Great Zimbabwe craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area and the female teachers in Masvingo District.

7.2 Sample

A sample of 30 women at the Great Zimbabwe craft centre conveniently sampled at their stands and the 30 female teachers conveniently sampled at the district Education offices as they come for services were used in the study. Convenient sampling technique was used to draw the 60 participants from the Great Zimbabwe craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area and the female teachers in the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sports and Culture in Masvingo district.

The selected subjects were believed to be knowledgeable about economic viability of the indigenous knowledge systems and the earnings that accrue to each category of the participants. Each individual who took part in this research was consulted and agreement was reached on what data to be collected and included in the research. The privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of respondents was upheld and guaranteed in this research.

7.3 Data gathering instrument

The study used the questionnaire as the data gathering instrument. The questionnaire was administered to women at the Great Zimbabwe craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area and the female teachers in the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture in Masvingo district in February 2011.

7.4 Data gathering procedures

Respondents were asked to fill in the questionnaire on the spot. This method was preferred because it ensured a 100 percent return of the completed questionnaire and it was cheaper and easier to administer, while the processing of data was less complex than could be the case if, say observations were used (Babbie, 1997) and (Dumbu and Matanda, 2010).

7.5 Data analysis

Data was organised and qualitatively analysed according to issues or themes as raised by the respondents.

8. Results and discussion

Issues pertaining to the viability of the indigenous knowledge and skills in women in craft at Great Zimbabwe craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area.

8.1 Characteristics of the respondents

Sixty women (n=30 women in craft; n=30 female teachers in the Ministry of Education Arts, Sport and Culture) completed the questionnaire on the economic viability of the indigenous knowledge and skills in women empowerment in craft at Great Zimbabwe craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area and their female counterparts in the Ministry of Education Arts, Sport and Culture. These are the people with the first hand information with regards to economic viability of the indigenous knowledge and skills in Masvingo district. The respondents bear testimonies of economic viability of the indigenous knowledge and skills as they are the ones that look after the families in most cases in Zimbabwean lifestyle.

8.2 Earnings differentials

The concept of wage differential does not really explain why people earn more than others or why some occupations command higher wages than others (Dumbu and Musingafi 2010; Ruffin and Gregory 1989; McConnell and Brue 2002). If all people were the same and if all jobs were the same, then everyone would earn the same wage. Therefore because of individual differences that exist among people earnings will differ.

8.2.1 Earnings of Women using the indigenous knowledge and skills in craft

The study established that the women in craft at Great Zimbabwe craft centre can earn as much as close to USD \$500 per month on average. On days when there is high business, like the public holidays such as Easter holiday, Independence Day, hero's day and Christmas holidays, the women in craft at the Great Zimbabwe craft centre can earn as much as \$800. The following excerpts bear this testimony:

- I have been at this craft centre for more than 10 years and my income from the sales of the craft artifacts here has managed to reach close to USD \$550 per month.
- I and my colleagues here have been here since time immemorial and we are managing to get an income of USD \$600 per month.
- Income from the sale of our products from the craft skills is ranging from USD 450 to around USD 500 per month on average but on brisk business months like festive seasons we can get more than this.

From the above statements it is concluded that the women in craft at the Great Zimbabwe craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area have an average income of USD \$580 per month. In Zimbabwean standards this income is above the poverty datum line which the civil servants are urging their employer to close gap of their salaries to the poverty datum line. What this implies is that the women at the Great Zimbabwe craft centre who are using their indigenous knowledge and skills are earning far more than their counterpart female teachers in Masvingo District. Most of the women (65%) at the Great Zimbabwe craft centre indicated that their level of education is slightly

above grade seven standards as most of the respondents indicated that they have not gone for secondary education. However there are others (35%) who have attempted ordinary level but did not score subjects but simply are surviving on the use of the traditional knowledge that has been passed on from generation to generation by their elders in craft works.

8.2.2 Earnings of female teachers in the Ministry of education, Arts, Sport and Culture

It emerged from this study that the female teachers in the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture, in the graduate teacher scale earn a salary of USD \$190 on average depending on one's experience. Salaries for the civil servants have been a bone of contention between the government workers and the Public Service commission, which is their employer. The female teachers who responded in this study had the following to say with regard to their earnings:

- Despite the fact that I have invested in education the salary I am getting is meagre, you can not see the reason for one spending time and resources acquiring higher education.
- Our salaries are peanuts
- It is because we are not earning anything that make us very unmotivated to work and our war with the government will not stop until we are recognised remuneration wise to earn better than the vendors in the streets.
- The salary of USD \$190, I am getting from my employer is too far short of my basic needs. What do you think I can do with a salary which is simply gobbled by municipality and ZESA rates?
- Those women who are using their craft skills are earning better than us who have attained a higher education.

The above testimonies by the female teachers in the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture show that the teachers are earning below their level of investment in higher education. A comparison of the earning or incomes received by the women in the craft business at Great Zimbabwe Craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area with the salaried graduate teachers in the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture shows that those women who depend on the traditional knowledge and skills get a higher disposable income (Dumbu and Musingafi 2010) than their counterpart salaried graduate female teachers. The women in craft business who use their indigenous knowledge and skills earn an income which is three times greater than their counterpart female salaried graduate teachers in the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture.

8.3 Access to foreign currency: Women using their indigenous knowledge and skills

The study established that the women who use their indigenous knowledge and skills in craft at the Great Zimbabwe craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area have access to foreign currency. They obtain the foreign currency from the international tourists who visit the Great Zimbabwe Monuments from time to time. The place is situated at a strategic place where the tourists, both local and foreign access the products that are offered for sale by the women in craft. Some of the respondents have the following to say about foreign currency:

- When tourists come to visit Great Zimbabwe monuments, they pass through our stands and make purchases of our craft artifacts which we display.
- I have managed to access foreign currency from my use of the indigenous knowledge and skills on craft.
- Most of the foreign currency that we use in the form of the South African rand is obtained from sales of the craft we do here.
- I can get at least R1000 or more per month of foreign currency basically from the South African tourists who visit this place.

The above issues testify that the women who use their indigenous knowledge and skills have access to foreign currency. They obtain foreign currency from the sales (Begg, Fischer and Dornbusch 2000) of the craft articles they make using the traditional resources and the traditional skills and knowledge which has been passed on to them traditionally. The ability of the women using their traditional knowledge and skills in craft to access foreign currency implies their ability to survive in the harsh economic conditions because foreign currency is a form of saving to these women. Money obtained in the form of foreign currency provides a basis for basic savings in the economy.

8.4 Access to foreign currency: Salaried graduate female teachers in the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture.

It is the contention of this study that the female salaried graduate teachers do not access foreign currency outside their United States Dollar for their salaries. They have no other sources of strong currencies they can access. One hundred (100%) of the respondents in this category have indicated that they do not access at all any foreign currency because they are not in to trade. They simply put it straight with the following statements:

- I do not access foreign currency as I am not into cross border trading or into any other business that earns me foreign currency.
- Foreign currency is something that is hard to come by.

- I do not know when I last pocketed a rand into my pocket.
- Any other foreign currency, except for the adopted United States Dollar is difficult to get especially when one is a teacher.

The above testimonies indicate that the female graduate teacher finds it hard to access any form of foreign currency serve for the United States Dollar which has been officialised by the government as currency for domestic transaction. The rand and the pula which used to flow in the hands of the public are not easier to access even with such learned individuals of the society like the graduate teachers.

8.5 Survival skills in harsh economic conditions: Women using indigenous knowledge system

It was the contention of this study that women in craft using their indigenous knowledge have a higher chance of surviving in the economic conditions which are tough. The women have a greater access to foreign currency and they earn a higher income as compared to their counterpart female teachers in the Ministry of Education, Art, Sport and Culture. The study also obtained that the female salaried graduate teachers have a slim chance of accessing foreign currency if ever they can access it. Their salary earning are three times more than the earnings which the women using their indigenous knowledge and skills. What can be concluded from this is that the survival chances for those women in craft are quite higher than the survival chances in women in formal employment in government service. Women using the indigenous knowledge and skills access higher income and foreign currency better than their female counterparts in the salaried occupation. This gives them a chance to survive better and obtain a better standard of living in terms of access to some better basic goods and services on the market. The following excerpts bear these testimonies:

- We have access to a better living standards than the female teachers especially when it comes to standards of goods and services that we can access.
- Female teachers are not getting close to what we get from the proceeds of our sales of the craft which we make using our indigenous knowledge. This assists us to interact with the international market where we access the foreign currency and a better inflow of income than the teachers.

From the above testimonies, it can be deduced that the female degree salaried teachers are not able to withstand economic pressures than their counterpart women who rely on the use of the indigenous knowledge and skills.

9. Conclusions

The study concluded that women blessed with the traditional or the indigenous knowledge and skills are getting an income which is three times greater than the income that their female counterparts in the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sports and Culture who are in the graduate teacher scale. What can be concluded from this is that education is not the only panacea for high income earnings. With the little education the women in craft business have, they are managing to beat the graduate female teacher in terms of income by simply using the traditional craft knowledge and skills that were passed onto them from generations beyond.

The study also concluded that the women with the indigenous knowledge and skills are further accessing foreign currency better than the female graduate teachers. It has been indicated in the study that the women at Great Zimbabwe craft centre in Chief Mugabe's area have access to international currencies because the market which they deal with comprises the tourists who visit the famous Great Zimbabwe monuments. The tourist market is quite lucrative for the local craft women who are using their indigenous knowledge and skills. The females in the Ministry do not have access to the tourists so that they can be able to access some foreign currency.

The fact that the women at the Great Zimbabwe craft centre have a two pronged sources of income from the sales of their indigenously produced craft facts that is from sales and access to foreign currency, definitely they are bound to have a better living standards than their counter parts in the government sector.

10. Recommendations

The results obtained in this research confirm that there is need for the policy makers in higher education to incorporate the shunned indigenous knowledge and skills into the education curriculum. This can be done in order to allow diversity of skills in the workforce of the country and obtain maximum output from the locally available natural resources that are lying dotted around the Great Zimbabwe area under the jurisdiction of Chief Mugabe. The local community can be educated on the importance of the indigenous knowledge in various sectors of the economy because currently there a very few people who are regarding the use of indigenous knowledge as source of livelihood. The donor communities can be engaged through responsible government ministries and department to conduct several workshops on the importance of the indigenous knowledge in the area around the Great Zimbabwe monuments. It can also be useful for the local universities such as the Great Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Open University to conduct researches as to the development of the indigenous knowledge think tanks that will allow the restoration of the knowledge and skills in traditional wisdom.

Higher education has a pivotal role to play in the preservation of the indigenous knowledge in the country and in the region. The preservation of the information is very important for the future use of the knowledge in future generation. If there is no such a preservation of knowledge there is threat of extinction of the knowledge. It is therefore recommended that the local universities such as the Great Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Open University champion the documentation of the knowledge and skills. The documentation can be done through interviewing the on job personnel in the craft business and the elderly community.

The study also recommended that there is need for the government to consider the indigenous knowledge and skills as an alternative source of employment for the local population. If one considers the earnings received by the women in craft business, one is tempted to conclude that the level of education can not be the only barometer for pegging wages and salaries but in the true sense, traditional knowledge and skills can pave way for gainful employment to the local people. This has a chance of alleviating the unemployment challenges which the country is currently facing.

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