

Utilisation Of Film and Video for Documentation and Dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous knowledge system – the traditional approaches and mechanisms that people utilize to meet their individual and community needs – developed or acquired by aborigines of a society or community have been serving the needs of such people or community. Sometimes, such knowledge is either looked down on by its owners or denigrated due to external imperialistic influence. At other times, the extent of utilisation and benefits derived from it is marginal due to the fact that access to such knowledge is limited due to lack of massive awareness. However, this challenge can be mitigated if indigenous knowledge is documented and promoted through a combination of indigenous media in the film and video. This would enhance the dissemination of indigenous knowledge and diffusion of innovations.

Keywords: Film, multimedia, Indigenous knowledge system

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Introduction

Indigenous technology shares existence with the people. It is what the people have developed over time, though it might have changed, adapted or even influenced by social, cultural or economic factors. But in whatever state, such knowledge have retained their utility or relevance.

Indigenous knowledge also referred to as local knowledge is the wisdom, technology or know-how held, inherited or shared by people in the community and transferred from generation to generation. Such knowledge can be anything that promotes their welfare or wellbeing. It can be about agriculture, health, environment, security, peace and order, etc.

This paper would be discussed under the following sub-headings:

- i. Abstract
- ii. Introduction
- iii. Theoretical Framework
- iv. Indigenous knowledge system: The repository of the arts, science and technology for development in indigenous societies.
- v. Model for documenting and disseminating indigenous knowledge for development
- vi. Indigenous knowledge as materials for film, video and broadcast programmes
- vii. Conclusion and recommendations.

Theoretical Framework

The paper has as its theoretical framework the development media, diffusion of innovations and technological determination theories.

Development Media Theory: This theory prescribes positive use of the media in national development, to the extent they favour democratic and grassroots involvement in national development goals. McQuail (1988, p. 121) states that “media should accept and carry out positive developmental tasks in line with nationally established policy”.

Diffusion of Innovations: The French sociologist and legal scholar – Gabriel Tarde is credited for originating the basic idea of diffusion of innovations. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2010, p. 307), diffusion is the process by which an innovation makes its way over time to members of a social system.

An innovation is the introduction of something new – a project, practice or idea. The innovation – decision process is the process of progression an individual goes through from first encountering an innovation to its adoption. Innovativeness is a measure of early adoption; individuals are considered innovative and potential change agents if they are more willing to adopt new ideas than other members of a system and likely to do so earlier than others. Finally the rate of adoption of an innovation is the relative speed with which an innovation is adopted.

Technological Determinism Theory: Marshall McLuhan suggested that societies move through distinct technological ages (like print or digital), with each new medium fundamentally altering human experience and social structures.

Technological determinism is a theory which posits that technology is the primary driver of social, cultural and economic change, shaping how societies function and individual hunk, feel and act.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems: The Repository of the Arts Science and Technology for the Development of Indigenous Societies

Leveridge (2024) writes extensively that indigenous knowledge systems represent a rich and diverse source of understanding that has evolved over thousands of years, rooted in the intimate relationship between indigenous peoples and their natural environments. These knowledge systems encompass ecological, cultural, spiritual, and social dimensions, offering insights into sustainable practices, environmental stewardship, and community-based management.

Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) refer to the cumulative body of knowledge, practices, and beliefs developed by Indigenous peoples through their interactions with the environment. This knowledge is passed down orally from generation to generation and is deeply embedded in the cultural, social, and spiritual lives of Indigenous communities. Unlike Western scientific knowledge, which often compartmentalizes knowledge into disciplines, Indigenous knowledge is holistic, considering the interconnectedness of all elements in the environment-land, water, plants, animals, and humans.

Key Characteristics of Indigenous Knowledge Systems include:

- **Holistic Understanding of the Environment:** Indigenous knowledge systems recognize the interconnectedness of natural systems. Rather than viewing humans as separate from nature, Indigenous perspectives see people as integral parts of ecosystems.
- **Long-Term Perspective:** Indigenous knowledge has been shaped by centuries of experience in managing and sustaining ecosystems. This long-term perspective offers valuable insights into sustainable practices and environmental resilience.
- **Oral Tradition:** Much of Indigenous knowledge is passed down through stories, ceremonies, and oral teachings. This oral tradition is crucial for maintaining the cultural heritage of Indigenous communities and for sharing knowledge in a way that reflects the community's values and worldview.

Traditional ecological knowledge is also an integral part of indigenous knowledge systems. This comprises:

- **Sustainable resource management:** Indigenous communities have developed practices that promote balance and sustainability in their environments. Examples include rotational hunting, controlled burning, and selective harvesting.
- **Species and ecosystems:** Traditional ecological knowledge often contains detailed knowledge of local species and their behaviors, interactions, and roles within ecosystems.
- **Environmental change:** Indigenous peoples have observed and adapted to environmental changes over generations, providing important historical records of climate variations, species migrations, and ecosystem shifts.

Communication in Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Leveridge (2024) further states that communication within Indigenous knowledge systems is deeply connected to cultural traditions, values, and community relationships. Unlike Western communication, which often emphasizes linear and formal modes of communication, Indigenous communication is relational, contextual, and highly integrated with cultural practices.

Some key aspects of Indigenous communication include:

1. **Oral Tradition and Storytelling**

Storytelling is a central mode of communication in many Indigenous cultures. Stories are used not only to entertain but to educate, transmit cultural values, and convey important ecological knowledge. Storytelling allows for the transmission of knowledge in a way that is dynamic, engaging, and accessible to all members of the community, from elders to children

- **Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer:** Oral traditions ensure that knowledge is passed down through generations, maintaining a living connection to the past. Elders play a crucial role as knowledge keepers, sharing their experiences and wisdom through stories, songs, and ceremonies.
- **Cultural and Ecological Narratives:** Indigenous stories often incorporate ecological observations and lessons about living in harmony with the land. These narratives teach respect for the environment and guide sustainable resource management practices.

2. **Symbolism and Ceremony**

In Indigenous cultures, communication often occurs through symbols, rituals, and ceremonies. These non-verbal forms of communication carry deep meaning and are integral to the expression of community values, identity, and relationships with the land.

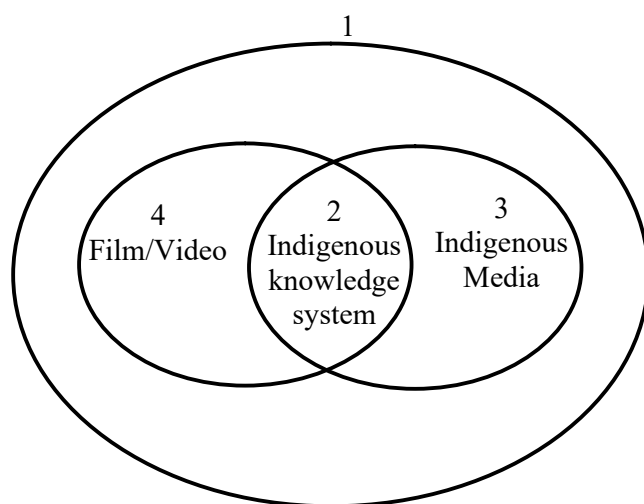
- **Ceremonial Practices:** Ceremonies are used to mark important events, honor the natural world, and foster a sense of connection between individuals, communities, and their environments. For example, ceremonies might be held to give thanks for a successful harvest or to honor the changing of seasons.
- **Symbolism in Nature:** Many Indigenous cultures view certain animals, plants, and landscapes as symbolic. These natural symbols convey messages about the inter-connectedness of life, respect for nature, and the responsibility to care for the environment.

3. **Respectful Dialogue and Consensus Building**

Indigenous communication emphasizes the importance of respectful dialogue, listening, and consensus-building. Decisions about land, resources, and community matters are often made collectively, with a strong emphasis on hearing and considering all perspectives. This participatory approach to decision-making is rooted in values of respect, reciprocity, and relational accountability.

- **Listening to Elders:** In many Indigenous cultures, elders are highly respected as the carriers of wisdom and experience. Their input is sought on important decisions, and their voices are central in community discussions.
- **Community Engagement:** Indigenous communities often engage in collective discussions where every member has the opportunity to speak. This process fosters a deep sense of inclusion and shared responsibility for decisions that affect the community and the environment.

Model for Documenting and Disseminating Indigenous Knowledge for Development



Model: Charles Obot, 2025

Explanation

1. Indigenous or local community
2. Indigenous knowledge system. This provides content for indigenous media and film/video.
3. Indigenous media through which indigenous knowledge gets disseminated from generation to generation.
4. Film and video utilised to document and enhance the dissemination of indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous Media: Channels for Dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous communication channels such as oral media (Town crier, songs, markets, stories), instrumental communication modes comprising idiophones, aerophones, and membranophones could be used to disseminate indigenous knowledge, development information, stimulate discussion, mobilize and enlighten the people.

Traditional institutions such as the chieftaincy, age/youth groups, opinion leaders, churches/other faith-based organizations and women associations are also vital channels for disseminating indigenous knowledge development messages and mobilizing the people to execute development programmes. On the role of market women's association in development communication, Wilson (1997. P. 84, 94) notes thus:

... Women's association belong to the category of economic-interest channel which women employ for various purposes but ostensibly to promote their economic interests and provide virile channels for communication and development among their membership... These women also embark on other development projects and levies are often imposed on their membership... The inevitable conclusion is that the market women's associations are very potent sources and channels of development communication... so for society's development efforts to succeed, such associations should be consulted and used since women themselves form a larger percentage of our population.

Writing in support of indigenous media's role in development, Awa (1998, p. 224) adds that Africa's indigenous media such as village theatre has been popular and effective. This is because "it is transactional and highly participatory, allowing participants to work with new information within a familiar and comfortable format that also allows communicators to modify their messages in response to verbal and nonverbal audience feedback." The efficacy of community theatre for development is widely acknowledged. Quoting McLor, Epskamp (1998, p. 88) argues that

Give an audience a lecture and they will listen. Give an audience some theatre and they will participate. Ministries and agencies in Zimbabwe seeking to promote better health, literacy and social awareness have come to that realization. These community theatre groups in Zimbabwe try to make the general audience aware of the problem of how to handle physically-disabled persons within the community as well as how to handle other outcasts within the society. These groups are also active in health care information campaigns, which aim at preventing venereal diseases and AIDS.

Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010, p. 136) emphasize that theatre/drama is useful in development communication efforts because of its unique quality of combining education, entertainment and stimulating participation and discussion. They explain that:

theatre as a medium in development communication is largely participatory and democratic. Community members can play active part in the making of the content and issues displayed. It can be used to explore community problems, the people's views on them and generate solution to the problems. As such, the people will be able to relate directly and understand those issues and fully enjoy integration. Theatre can serve as both an educational tool and a learning process. Theatre as a learning process can be used to identify, analyze and discuss community problems as well as seek solutions to them with the participation of community members. As an educational tool, it can be used to communicate information on different issues to bring about attitudinal and behavioural change.

Visual or pictorial mode of communication can also be useful in disseminating indigenous knowledge for development messages especially where there are linguistic barriers associated with written and spoken language. Pictures or sign in communication is an attempt to complement the spoken word with pictures and to by-pass the use of the written word, which would require prior literacy of the audience. Pictures could be used to communicate, explain or represent development issues a community is grappling with.

Irrespective of the literacy level of members of the community, community media such as newspaper, radio and television can serve the development needs of the people. The power or effectiveness of community media lies in the fact that they provide members of the community unrestricted access and opportunity for participation as well as local relevance in their contents. Moreover, the medium of communication is often and mostly indigenous language of the host community.

Indigenous Knowledge as Materials for Film, Video and Broadcast Programme Contents

By nature, indigenous knowledge develops overtime – it is change, adapted and influenced by social, cultural and economic factors. Indigenous knowledge also known as traditional knowledge or local knowledge is the wisdom held and shared by the people in your community and passed down from generation to generation.

It can be knowledge about farming, methods, medicine, technologies, the environment, the spiritual world or anything else that is important to a particular community of people. Some indigenous knowledge is common and shared widely. Traditional recipes are an example. Similarly, a broadcast programme that promotes indigenous knowledge should encourage audience participation and draw stories from the area in which it is broadcast. In this way, your programme can successfully reflect local history, cultural values and language.

Whether the programme is a short length segment aired or to be aired on a regular basis or a single-feature length (half-an-hour or longer) show, you can interview a local person, arrange a follow-up segment, a panel discussion featuring local people with differing points of view on an issue or organize an on-air date. A story-telling format can be used to communicate indigenous knowledge.

Film and Video in the Dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge for Development

Video can play a vital role in development. A professional or skillful television/film producer can use video in development communication. He/she can also make community members participate actively in all aspects/stages of such production. Lie and Mandler (2009) classify the use of video in development into four, namely: video for awareness raising and advocacy, video for stakeholder engagement and action, video for capacity building as well as video for reporting and data collection.

Film and Video for Awareness Raising and Advocacy

According to Lie and Mandler (2009), videos for awareness raising are produced to alert people to certain issues, ideas, concepts or problems. Often, they closely resemble documentary films, where the aim is to screen the film for regular impact on a predetermined audience. Videos for awareness raising tend to use a rhetoric that could be termed persuasive. The attractiveness of the content e.g. use of humour and entertainment value the information being communicated, quality of the rhetoric, good research on the topic in hand, good production elements, etc are key to its effectiveness.

Why Use Film/Video for Awareness Raising?

An awareness-raising video highlights a special issue (e.g. global warming, biodiversity, conservation agriculture, fair trade, human rights. HIV/AIDS) in order to create awareness about this issue among a particular audience. This audience can be a specific target group, such as farmers or a geographically-defined audience, such as a village, or it can be the general public.

Video is an effective tool for awareness raising. It can portray visually many issues or arguments which might otherwise remain unknown to the audience. It can be screened in a variety of ways (e.g. on TV, at mass events. in local venues, via the Internet and it has the potential to reach many people, combine mass media with social mobilization and stimulate dialogue between different levels of interest. Video can also help raise awareness of individual power and of the power positions of other people, and contribute to giving people control over their lives.

Film/Video for Advocacy

Lie and Mandler (2009) point out that, like videos for awareness raising, videos for advocacy are characterized by an intention to persuade viewers to change their behaviour or actions, but these videos are aimed at a specific audience of decision-makers. They cross borders of power.

Advocacy can be defined as "speaking and/or acting on behalf of people to secure the services they need and the rights to which they are entitled. Advocacy aims to ensure that people's opinions, wishes or needs are expressed and listened to" (Suffock Country Council, 2008). Put another way, it aims to convince people

with the power (e.g. policy makers) to address the urgent concerns of a particular group of people. Video advocacy then is the process of integrating video into an advocacy effort to achieve heightened visibility or impact in a campaign. (Cadwell, 2005).

Why use Film/Video for Advocacy?

There are several reasons why videos can be an effective advocacy instrument. First, they can bring overlooked or marginalized stakeholders to the doorstep of decision-makers, in a mediated way. This can promote inclusion of their stories, concerns and proposals in the decision-making process by enabling (secondary) stakeholders to learn through this interaction with other (primary) stakeholders. Videos thus function as a bridge between a marginalized stakeholder and a decision-maker. (Witterern *et al.* 2009).

Second, video offers a way of documenting a process and compressing what could be a long story into a short film. It is able to wrap complex problems and processes into easily digestible pieces. Third, video can personalize complex processes and put the emphasis on the particular issues that the producers want to advocate. It illustrates the strength of using emotions and imagery in processes of persuasion, an important element in advocacy activities.

Film/Video for Stakeholder Engagement and Action

Lie and Mandler (2009) explain that videos in this category are intended for use in multi-stakeholder development activities, with the focus on how to address complex development problems and realities. This type of videos is used to bring together diverse stakeholders from a variety of levels, ranging from local to global, to debate, to discuss, negotiate and reach decisions. Producing and using these videos are seen as activities embedded in a broader communication process; they are just one of several communication platforms.

An important characteristic of videos for stakeholder engagement and action is that they are used for sharing shareholders' views and for learning, mediation, conflict resolution and encouraging action. Unlike videos for advocacy, they do not seek to inform or convince decision-makers. Also, whereas videos for advocacy are part of a vertical communication process (communication between actors at different hierarchical levels, bottom-up or top-down), videos for stakeholder engagement and action are parts of a horizontal communication process (communication within networks and via stakeholder platforms).

In stakeholder engagement and action, we are often dealing with complex problems, conflict situation, competing interests and views and negotiation. Issues of empowerment and giving people a voice therefore need to be considered from the perspective of multi-stakeholder, participatory and demand-driven development. The development arena is multi-faceted and involves many stakeholders; all with their own opinions, needs and preferences. One of the basic challenges of development is to address those stakeholders who might be overlooked or marginalized. Powerful stakeholders are now aware that they have to engage. In this context, the use of video in conflict management and negotiation can be extremely relevant and effective platform for highlighting and exchanging different views, realities, and life histories (oral testimonies).

Why use Video for Stakeholder Engagement and Action?

Lie and Mandler (2009) explain the rationale for using video for stakeholder engagement and action. There are two main reasons for using videos for stakeholder engagement and action. The first is that video can overcome literacy barriers by using powerful images and Contextualizing reality. It enables a variety of perspectives to be presented in a balanced way, with no one particular 'reality' dominating and with many voices from different geographical zones and backgrounds being heard. It allows divergent or even conflicting views to be shared with opponents, rivals and even enemies.

The second reason is that it enables people to exercise their democratic right and speak directly to elected representative (mediated participation). It can be effective where the intended audience does not have much time (e.g. policy makers) or wants to re-examine politically and socially sensitive issues (e.g. HIV/AIDS and domestic abuse). It can be essential with people who cannot or do not want to move from their own environment, but wish to talk directly to a particular audience (e.g. policy makers). Moving out of a 'home territory' to talk to important unknown people in an alien environment can affect spontaneity. Video creates a 'safe space' for people to speak and it does not restrict the engagement process to standard venues, such as village meeting halls. And it can bring reality from the meeting room back to the community.

Film/Video for Capacity Building

Video can be used as a tool for sharing information and increasing the knowledge and practical skills of a particular audience. This type of video is commonly used in agricultural extension to facilitate the introduction of new practices and effective techniques. It can portray practical instructions, good practices, adopted and modified by innovators, local innovations, research results, or outcomes from collaborations between farmers,

extension workers and researchers. The video content is usually 'packaged' by extension workers, researchers, communication professionals, or a combination of these people. Sometimes these videos are produced through participatory processes involving some of the target audience.

Film/Video for Rural Learning

The areas where video is currently used most extensively are agricultural extension and rural learning. Modes of use can vary. They can be combined with other forms of communication mechanism, such as face-to-face training. They can be used to train extension workers in regional district offices and for training-of-trainers courses. They can also be used to directly target farmers and other stakeholders in the food production chain.

Film/Why use Video for Rural Learning

Video for rural learning provides an opportunity to 'customize' training material by portraying farmers speaking the local language and dealing with familiar crops, soils and other general conditions where they target farmers. Involving farmers in producing video for capacity building has proved to be an effective strategy in stimulating them to experiment with new ideas and practices. Farmers are more favourably disposed towards trying out new practices when they see the experiences of fellow farmers.

Another important reason for using video for rural learning is that it can compress time. Time is a major constraint for extension workers. For example, showing the effects of using a fertilizer implies waiting for some time before observing the results. Video can overcome this by showing long natural or agricultural processes in a short period of time, ideally in the local setting. A well-known example is documenting the life cycle of a pest that damages crops. The language in a video for rural learning, and in its facilitation, must be appropriate to the targeted end-users. Local language versions of these videos enable them to reach more people and reduce dependence on intermediaries.

Film/Video for Exchange of Experiences and Reflection

Video can be used to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experiences relevant for development. This exchange can occur among people in the same community, or among different communities, farmer organizations and other development agencies working in the same field, in order to highlight a particular experience, suggest alternative ways to improve a certain activity and/or stimulate research on solutions to particular problems. These videos are often in the form of a documentary consisting of interviews and testimonies of people involved in a particular project or activity.

A central aim for the exchange of experiences and reflection is to document and screen real stories in order to help those who are involved in similar situations to see that there are other ways of meeting challenges and solving problems, as well as to question and reflect upon their own experiences. These videos can play the role of a mirror, helping not only to look back at experiences, but also to anticipate future situations and thus create greater preparedness among the viewers.

Film/Video for Reporting and Data Collection

Focus here is on using video for reporting (e.g. to replace or accompany written reports), research (e.g. collecting data for monitoring and evaluation purposes) and documentation (e.g. oral history projects and video letters).

Film footage captures reality and can be used as a visual report, as data for analysis and as a record of activities. Common use of video in development work includes qualitative research, action research, monitoring and evaluation, reporting to donors, visual reporting, oral history and video letters.

Video can be used for primary data collection as well as for secondary data analysis. When video is recorded mainly for data registration, this is called primary data collection. When it is used for data analysis, this is called secondary data analysis, in that the reality that has been filmed has been edited and translated into a film. The film-maker has selected from the original film what footage to use and how to present it, and thus what is screened is not reality but an interpreted reality.

Development is a product of utilization of appropriate information and innovation. The extent to which society or a community develops depends on how much relevant information it has at its disposal. The type of media or media mix within a community will go a long way in determining the quantity and quality of development information such society has access to as well as the pace it develops.

Conclusion

Indigenous knowledge systems are the essence of a society's continuous existence. They provide the bedrock of a society's development and sustainable growth. Society's identity and uniqueness can be traced to its indigenous knowledge systems.

Recommendations

Development in any society can be expedited if a two-pronged approach or model is adopted. Modern technology or science and indigenous knowledge systems should perform complementary roles to meet the needs of the people.

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