

# INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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**INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE  
PRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY  
NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

**EDITED BY**

**Olusegun Fariudeen LIADI  
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## CHAPTER ONE

### Indigenous Knowledge and Development Practice

Olusegun Fariudeen LIADI

Dauda Aderemi BUSARI

#### Introduction

For more than five decades now Nigeria has been challenged by national development hiccups and frustrations. This (under)-development experience raises the question concerning development paths, strategies and ideology adopted post-independence. Over the years, there have been various debates and commentaries on the virtuousness of Western-capitalist development model and its implications on live and livelihood of the general populace. In development scholarship, there appears a gradual shift in attention to re-evaluate the value of Indigenous knowledge and techniques in development praxis. Locally (in Nigeria) the value of indigenous knowledge is increasingly becoming a subject of intense attention among practitioners and scholars. Indeed, many government policies and programmes are conceived with what is generally called inclusion of the “local content” referring implicitly to indigenous knowledge and skills. This is beginning to move this knowledge system from the periphery to a central status in development practices across the country. Yet, few scholars have tried to take account of the current nature and dimension of the re-emergence and a seeming embracement of indigenous knowledge from the periphery. The once despised knowledge system is increasingly advertised as the probable solution not only to development but to sustainable development in Africa. Hence, it is out of this observation that the current edited book was initiated.

The book is an exploration of current realities and practical applications of indigenous knowledge in everyday live among people and government in Nigeria. With the myriad of challenges confronting the nation and the fact that home grown solutions are required in the face of apparent failure of external development strategies (Liadi, 2014), the book embed the three major perspectives of colonialism vis the epic fame, the episodic interpretation and the coloniality of power to appropriate the argument that indigenous knowledge is based on local, ecological and seasonal process of socialisation as against the perspective of a non-indigenous or western traditions that supported the narrative of foreign epistemology.

The central focus of this book therefore is, to produce scholarly insights into the various dimensions of applicability of indigenous knowledge systems in Nigeria in order to assess its current realities and challenges within the development praxis in the country. This is because, as will soon be cleared, a factor for the absence of development since independence is the externalization of policies and strategies upon which African nations in general and Nigeria development in particular is driven. The common questions running through all the chapters in the volume are how do local people and groups appropriate indigenous knowledge to solve daily live and livelihood problems? Is indigenous knowledge system sanctioned or censored in current development process in Nigeria? The collection of papers in this book introduces readers to the resilience of indigenous knowledge system with examples and cases from Nigeria. The book is organized into five sections: section i: the introduction and Indigenous building technology; section ii: security system and crime control; section iii: ethno-medical practices; section iv: communication system and identity formation; section v: politics and political structure.

The introductory chapter and Olusegun Liadi and Akinpelu Olutayo's essay comprise the first section and are partly concerned with forming the concern of this volume. Liadi and Olutayo's chapter significantly focused on developing the idea that technology can be viewed beyond the instrumentalist approach and more as knowledge system. Demonstrating the connections between culture, technology and building practices is the major focus of the chapter. Here Liadi and Olutayo's research focuses specifically on the issue of technology as knowledge system, and endeavour to analytically distinguished different kinds of technologies. In building practices, they distinguish between two technologies: across the hardware (devices/gadgets) system and the software (methodological) system in the process of indigenous construction. Using both secondary and primary data sources, Liadi and Olutayo connect the current challenges of housing witnessed across the country to the widespread negative attitude towards indigenous building technology and failure of government to institutionalize policy that drives local usage of the available traditional construction technologies and materials.

The second section of the book concerns the sphere of security system which is traditionally linked with criminology (or sociology of crime control). The first chapter offered here presents an analysis of the controversies, rationality and the perceived values of the newly established Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN), code-named Operation *Amotekun*, by south-western state governors. The chapter, authored by

Richard Aborishade, draws upon securitization theory and the sociology of political (in-)security to expose the relevance of indigenous security knowledge systems embedded in the various ethno-militia groups, vigilante and indigenous para-military outfits that provide security support across Nigeria. He draws attention to how past successes recorded by ethno-militia security systems in the six regions in the country are driving current establishment of a regional and indigenous security outfit (Operation *Amotekun*), by the six southwest governors in Nigeria. Aborishade points to the fact that adoption of a security systems hinged on indigenous knowledge and practice in the six states is in response to the ubiquitous insecurity crisis across the country, which has remained insurmountable for the Nigerian federal police. The author argues that this development represents a significant shift from the overreliance of Nigerian communities on formal crime control mechanisms to informal ones that deploy indigenous knowledge as well as practices and highlights the politics of mainstreaming indigenous security systems in Nigeria. The chapter ends with a proposal of the model with which the indigenous security system can work together with formal security agencies to foster safety and security of lives and properties in Nigeria.

Finally, in this section, Bakrin Sirajudeen Femi analyses how crime management and control has been pursued among the people of *Ìrùn-Àkókó* in Ondo state, Nigeria, through the annual festivals of *Àjàgbó* – a sociocultural practice designed against anti-social behaviour. Bakrin draws attention to the efficacy of this crime control strategy for the community peace and development. He opined that the sort of processes and procedures demanded by modern criminal justice system are not necessarily the most effective for crime prevention, and draws attention to the stratification/inequalities of treatment of offenders that may be promoted by workings of the modern justice system. Outlining the functionality of the shaming system of *Àjàgbó* for the people of *Ìrùn-Àkókó* and neighbouring communities in Ondo, he proposes a hybridized crime control mechanism which will involve complementarity of government institutionalized strategies with local indigenous methods to further combat crime and criminality in Nigeria. The implication for this is communal trust, and increasingly peaceful space for development actions.

In the third section of the book, with its focus on indignity, health and well-being, focus is on how ordinary Nigerians and indigenous health practitioners harness, appropriate and utilise ethno-medicine to achieve basic health needs. The contributions of Musediq Lawal; Lateef Kolawole and; Adeyinka Yusuf and Adejo Blessing Christianah illustrate different

opportunities and practices embedded in ethno-medicine particularly focusing on different aspects of Yoruba folk medical practices. Lawal Olufemi Musediq's paper focuses on the usage of traditional medicine for the treatment of Sick Cell Disease among the southwest people of Nigeria (Yoruba). Lawal relied on secondary data, particularly scholarly publications on medicinal plants used for the management of Sick Cell Disease and data from interviews conducted with practicing herbalists to argue that the Yoruba (in Nigeria) people are knowledgeable about Sick Cell Disease and that they understand the combination of plants and their usages for combating the disease. First the author discusses Sick Cell Anaemia and its disease condition with a specific case made for its existence in Nigeria. Lawal then relates the phenomenon of *Abiku* among Yoruba with the indigenous approaches in treatment of sickle cell disease. The author concludes by discussing the medicinal plants traditionally used for the management of sickle cell disease and the pattern of usage of medicinal plants for the management of sickle cell anaemia as well as the exposition and treatise on medicinal plants and treatment of sickle cell disease.

The second paper in the area of ethno-medicine is authored by Kolawole whose chapter addresses the continue patronage of traditional malaria treatment system for rural people of Iseyin in Oyo area of Nigeria. The paper generally explores the sources of indigenous plants with antimalarial properties used in the treatment of malaria as well as the existing knowledge, awareness and pattern of utilization related to malaria recognition and treatment in Iseyin Town. Using mixed methods to gather needed data, Kolawole demonstrated that while the people of Iseyin town possess good knowledge of indigenous herbal medicine for malaria, they however largely do not demonstrate good knowledge about their efficacy. His findings indicate a prevalence of Indigenous herbal treatment for malaria among those with low educational attainment at early stage of malaria but combined when the symptoms persist. However, education was not found to have significant effect on the utilization of herbal treatment for malaria as Kolawole illustrated that those with degrees and higher degrees were found to also patronise/engage in the usage of herbal treatments due to relapse of orthodox drugs. In the conclusion session, the claim was made that access to herbal drugs was becoming increasingly difficult due to urban encroachment on rural spaces as well as deforestation.

The concern with ethno-medicine continues in Adeyinka Tajudeen Yusuf and Adejo Christianah Blessing's exploration of factors associated with the continued patronage of indigenous processes to treat/heal people with orthopedic problems in Ibadan, Nigeria. Adeyinka and Adejo's article

presents similar view on the realities of indigenous knowledge and its patronage for patients with fractured bones/orthopedic problems. The indigenous orthopedic system study is important because of the seeming imbalance in the number of orthopedic surgeon to the total population which is put at a ratio 400 to 200,000,000. Using a rational choice theory and a methodological technique known as triangulation, the authors investigated and established the rationale behind fractured bone patients' assessment of the organisation of indigenous knowledge for treatment of fracture injuries. Adeyinka and Adejo's study indicates a positive evaluation of the services offered by traditional orthopaedic centres especially in the area of efficacy and cost of treatment. These two would appear to be the main factors influencing decision to patronise orthopedic centres instead of the modern facilities. The authors conclude their study by suggesting mainstreaming and proper structuring of the procedures for acquiring and utilization of indigenous therapeutic-medical knowledge in order for such knowledge to be adequately regulated and monitored.

From the issues of health and ethno-medicine, the book then shifts to the theme of information and telecommunication systems. The three essays presented here offer an analysis of the indigenous communication system and its role in identity formation and social control. In the first essay, a team of researchers consisting of AbdulJaleel Kehinde Shittu, Nafisat A. Adedokun-Shittu and Adedeji Ahmad Ajani explored some similarities between modern information telecommunication system and the indigenous Yoruba hieroglyphics – *aroko* – in terms of communication principles focused on classification of messages based on: public, internal, secrecy and confidentiality. The main argument of the paper is that *Àrokò* (The Yoruba Hieroglyphics) is an indigenous knowledge communication strategy devised as a secured network data packet for transmitting signals to an intended recipient of encrypted information shrouded in the message. The chapter thus used *Àrokò* to x-ray the act of coding and decoding information (data packet) in contemporary information telecommunication systems. To present this, the authors delved into indigenous practices of information dispersal for both private communication and public announcements. By examining museums artefacts and content analysing archival materials possible linkages between contemporary information communication systems and several principles of *Àrokò* related to information technology was revealed. The authors' essay therefore, shows how adaption of contemporary information system with indigenous forms of Indigenous knowledge and Information Communication Systems can be achieved.

From *Aroko* (Hieroglyphics) then the focus shifts to *Oriki* (Panegyric) a form of praise poetry performed widely among the Yoruba people of the Southwest Nigeria. Salaudeen and Adebisi investigated how oriki (panegyric) is appropriated as a strategic communication tool for individual personality development and self-identity among the Yoruba. Salaudeen and Adebisi's study was focused on three problematics: itemizing the functional prerequisite of *Oriki* for the Yoruba race; exploring the extent to which *oriki* is a strategic communication tool for socializing the young generation about good virtues; and the relations of these to societal development. Adopting functional theories and qualitative approach of key informant interview, Salaudeen and Adebisi revealed that while *oriki* culture appears to be dying among contemporary Yoruba parents, the capabilities of *oriki* for tracing and establishing consanguine traits among people of same descents; its significance for the formation of individuals with personalities fit for societal needs is not in doubt. The conclusion is reached that if the society re-established *oriki* as a popular culture among the new generation with the likelihood of inculcating quality ethical and social values in the young ones, there may be a re-incarnation of a generation of cultured and responsible citizenry with conscious developmental values/traits.

Taking these issues of indigenous knowledge and information communication technology further theoretically, the final chapter in this section by Olutayo Akinpelu and Busari Dauda argues that the defining characteristic of the natural and environment sciences is the ability to learn from nature with a view to modifying it for greater relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. Through a review of documentary evidences, Olutayo and Busari expose that such character seems to be lacking in the humanities, as, among others, information download from technology is not appropriately modified for relevance to the development of indigenous environment. They maintain that ICT in its MacDonalising, globalising and one-size fits all approach has only further complicated the development orientation in the modernisation by design of the 1950s and 60s thus perpetrating the underdevelopment processes in most of the developing nations. The implication for this is that, just as in the production and reproduction of plants, animals and the resulting technologies, there is a need for the understanding of the 'natural habitat' into which ICT is being downloaded if development in these nations would not be a mirage. Moreover, without appropriate 'genetic engineering' mix of indigenous knowledge and ICT, there would be a limit to how far ICT can go and grow.

The final section of the book contains two chapters with each focusing on politics and political imbalance implicated in governance challenges. In *Reforming the Modern with the Ancient*, a discourse focused on how the current governance debacle and structural deficiencies of the Nigerian political system could be assuaged with the indigenous political system, Animashaun Mojeed examined the crisis of governance in post-colonial Nigeria. First the author identifies major indicators and manifestations of governance crisis in Nigeria and discusses how the adoption of certain attributes of traditional administrative structures can help mitigate the deepening crisis confronting the modern state in Nigeria. Animashaun draws attention to weak legitimacy as a fundamental attribute associated with Nigeria's post-colonial state. He suggests that the state is perceived by the people as an alien institution antithetical to their cultural values and having little interest in enhancing collective material existence. The implication of the inability of the post-colonial state to meet its primary obligations to the citizenry not only deepens the legitimacy crisis but also signals the failure of the modernist state project. He concludes that reversing this unacceptable trend requires reinventing the governance structures of the state.

The book concludes with Abdul-Fatai Raji's discourse on the influence of colonial interventions on modern African states and systems of governance. He observes that Africans have from the beginning of colonization resisted the imposition of alien rule. However, the superiority of the European military capability prevailed and, in the end, Europe forced herself on Africa and the colonization of the continent was further partitioned and consolidated. In this chapter Raji rejects, as Eurocentric, the description of Africa as backward, barbaric, uncivilized, illiterate and uncultured continent, while drawing attention to the idea that African societies had well developed and structured political and economic systems that provided for her citizens with little or no reliance on external assistance prior to colonialism. With aid of secondary data, he unveiled how colonialism emasculated the traditional African institutions with dire consequences. It concludes that, colonialism ensured that Africans lost their sense of pride and confidence in their own culture. It deprived Africa not only their political cum economic freedom and self-determination, but as well uprooted an established civilization. In view of this, the Raji suggests that, for the continent to progress, African leaders urgently need to look inward in proffering more sustainable solution to her persistent problems. Hence, the leaders must stop to import external solutions to solve Africa's internal challenges.

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