Parallel session 5: Challenges and tools directed to young people.

'MOTHEO' IKS PROJECT: PROMOTING THE STATUS OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE YOUTH BY ENGAGING LEARNERS IN PROCESSES REFLECTING ITS SCIENTIFIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC VALUE.

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Abstract

MOTHEO Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Project was developed from the concern African indigenous knowledge is gradually losing its status and also running the risk of being eroded. Custodians of indigenous knowledge, mainly elderly women and traditional healers do not have a system of recording this valuable knowledge. Due to the erosion of traditional mechanisms through which indigenous knowledge was transmitted from generation to generation, most of the younger generation, captured by western influence and formal education do not embrace indigenous knowledge and perceive it as backward and inferior. This state of affairs has to be reversed if the current drive to promote, develop and protect IKS in South Africa has to succeed. It is important to create the awareness among young people that IKS is a 'science' and that what makes it different from western science is the social, economic, political and cultural context.

Text

Context

There is a greater realization now in South Africa and other African countries, that development is to a large extent context-bound and that knowledge systems other than the dominant Western knowledge systems should occupy their rightful place in development theory and practice. However, there is still a lingering impression that IKSs are not on par with Western knowledge systems and this perception is contributing towards the erosion of indigenous knowledge. This false impression is also perpetuated by the capturing of the 'newly modernised groups' and in particular young people by western influence and formal education which does not incorporate concepts of IKS.

What this project would like to achieve is to create the awareness of the young people that traditional knowledge like the so-called modern science, is a 'science' in its own right. What makes traditional knowledge different from modern science is that it is a product of culture informed by social, economic and political context in which it is applied.

South Africa therefore needs to develop a corpus of academics and scientists who can contribute to both the gradual transformation of scientific ethos, ethics and practice as well as towards the development of a strong system of

protocols for development and protection of indigenous knowledge systems (Odora Hoppers, 2002).

It is against this background that the process of engaging learners in IKS dialogue and in documenting and recording scientific processes and other valuable uses of indigenous knowledge was initiated. The project is officially

OBJECTIVES

Primary objective:

To de-stigmatize IKS by creating the awareness of learners of its scientific and socio-economic value and the role it can play in sustainable socio-economic development.

Secondary objectives are:

To popularize indigenous knowledge systems and their related science and technology amongst schools and in communities.

To identify IK systems still practiced and biodiversity in the area as well as associated contemporary threats.

To create a database for storage and protection of gathered information as well as acknowledgement of the source.

To establish Community-Based IKS Study Groups in participating schools.

To facilitate the development and presentation of an IKS bridging course to empower and strengthen the capacity of knowledge holders and other interest groups.

Project Design

Target Groups

The project targeted Grade 11 learners from selected 10 high schools in the North West Province.

Project Approach

Learners were given an assignment using a well structure questionnaire to interview known custodians of IKS in their local villages for the purpose of collecting information that will create their awareness of the scientific and socio-economic value of indigenous knowledge. The challenge for learners was also to determine the commercialization potential of some of the indigenous resources identified. This exercise exposed learners to the S&T areas where IKS can be incorporated, such as pharmacology, biotechnology, etc.

An example is presented on the following table:

Indigenous Herbs

Types of Herbs	What they are used for		Types of Ailments used for	Any Myths?
	Medicinal	Nutritional		

Indigenous Skills/technologies used for preservation and processing of Herbs

Methods e.g. drying	Description of the process	Relationship or linkages to modern S&T	Weaknesses and Strengths	Any Myths?

Indigenous methods of conservation

Methods of Conservation	Are these methods still used/relevant	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities

Scientific and economic value

Opportunities for Propagation	Opportunities for Value-Adding

Achievements

The project succeeded to generate interest among participating learners and teachers in indigenous knowledge. Awareness of the scientific and socio-economic value of this knowledge was created. It was also an effective strategy to start a dialogue between the youth and custodians of indigenous knowledge and also to link science and society. The project is now replicated to other 30 schools in the North West Province.

Conclusion

This project will promote the following areas of transformation:

Equity and redress of historic imbalances:

This project will empower learners and communities to protect IKS by ensuring that it is not used without their approval and that commercialization strategies developed will promote equitable sharing of benefits.

Nation Building:

A nation without culture is like a tree without roots – dead. This project will promote the preservation and conservation of IKS by restoring its status and removing the stigma attached to it, particularly among the youth.

Skills Transfer:

Participating groups will be trained to capture and document indigenous knowledge. Various skills will be transferred to participants – from the theory of propagation of plants and herbs to the technologies of production, processing and packaging of new products.

Creation of partnerships and opportunities for disadvantaged communities:

Disadvantaged communities will form partnerships with community schools, academic institutions, government and science and technology institutions.

References

Odora Hoppers, C.A. (2002) Editor. Indigenous Knowledge and the Integration of Knowledge Systems.