

Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge (IK) also referred to as traditional knowledge or local knowledge is a system of knowledge based on a regional community's traditions. These traditions have developed based on the lived experience of indigenous people and relate to their particular way of life, thought, and behavior. IK systems largely relate to the survival needs of small, rural communities and include specific localized knowledge on topics such as medicine, agriculture, animal husbandry, natural resources, and weather patterns. The modern value of these local knowledge bases continues to be important for scientists who work to help these rural communities improve their quality of life and adapt to the changes of the modern world.¹

Origins

The main way indigenous knowledge develops is based on a culture of oral traditions. The techniques employed to utilize the land to its fullest potential for the community's well-being are passed down through generations. Each new generation learns from these stories while also adding to them as they develop new or better techniques to survive.² Thus, indigenous people are able to claim deep connections to the land and what it has to offer as their history and knowledge base often goes back to the original inhabitants of the area.

Their level of knowledge "reflects many generations of experience and problem-solving by thousands of ethnic groups across the globe."³ For instance, East African farmers are able to distinguish between different varieties of corn as well as particular differences in various types of potatoes understanding which ones farmers prefer and how best to cultivate them based on "taste, texture, storability, marketability, disease and pest resistance, and response to moisture stress."⁴ This relationship can often be so deep and reverential that they take on a spiritual or ritualistic aspect. However, since most indigenous knowledge is never physically recorded, there is a danger that the progress of modern society will cause it to disappear forever.⁵

Modern use

There are several reasons to protect IK including the needs of developing nations as they try and adapt to the modern world. "Indigenous knowledge is part of the lives of the rural poor" and can be utilized in helping these people become a part of the society's development.⁶ As societies

develop they have a greater need of food. These societies often use higher yielding grain from more developed nations to feed their growing numbers and help their economy. However, there is still a need for local knowledge, as a situation from the Ethiopia food security program illustrated. The imported higher yield grain planted by farmers in Ethiopia was not able to withstand a drought during the growing season, but the rural farmers had also planted local varieties that did survive, at least giving them enough food to eat.⁷ The IK of how to care for local varieties of grain was integral to surviving the drought showing the danger of losing such knowledge and the benefit of utilizing it as part of the strategy for a developing nation.

References

¹ "IPCC Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2007." *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Eds. M.L. Parry, O.F. Canziani, J.P. Palutikof, P.J. Van Der Linden and C.E. Hanson. IPCC.ch, n.d. Retrieved June 13, 2015.

² "What Is Indigenous Knowledge." *Worldbank.org*. Worldbank Group, n.d. Retrieved June 13, 2015.

³ Warren, D. M. "Indigenous Knowledge, Biodiversity Conservation and Development." *Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN)*. Earth Institute at Columbia University, n.d. Retrieved June 13, 2015.

⁴ See Endnote 3

⁵ See Endnote 2

⁶ See Endnote 2

⁷ See Endnote 2

External links

[What Is Indigenous Knowledge](#)

[Indigenous Knowledge in Weather Forecasting](#)

[Indigenous Knowledge, Biodiversity Conservation and Development](#)

[UNEP Resources on Indigenous Knowledge](#)