



A STRATEGY
FOR
INNOVATION
AND CHANGE

TRADITIONAL HEALTHCARE INTEGRATION NETWORK

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OUR REF

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Traditional and Cultural Knowledge Systems

Relevant Research Agenda (RRA)

Indigenous and Cultural knowledge as a development imperative requires sensitive design management and evaluation decisions about practices on the basis of understanding that is already available.

The inadequacy of scientific understanding about Traditional and Cultural Knowledge systems hampers development initiatives, attempting to make full use of the potential benefits of indigenous and cultural knowledge in sustainable development; for example in Primary Healthcare (PHC). Useful knowledge comprises both operational knowledge (indigenous technical knowledge) and explanatory knowledge (indigenous ecological knowledge).

Many local communities in many parts of Kenya, and also Africa, benefit from generations of experiences of management of complex ecological and health systems that take advantage associated with that complexity. However, there are serious gaps in understanding about many of the components and interactions in established systems.

An expedient means of filling the gap between what is currently known and what is needed, in order to make sensible decisions is urgently required. The knowledge is worthy of investigations as a valuable resource in understanding the ecological functioning and management of the system.

We see human action as conditioned by the value of system and attitudes found within a given society and by the amount and type of available resources at a given time and space. It has become customary and common to analyse situations and plan actions for a society in terms of human and material resources. However, the importance of value systems is too often neglected in planning for social and economic developments.

The term is understood in a broad sense, covering not only cultural aspects and human traits, but also interactions with the environments, both physical and behavioural.

The challenge is to improve / develop solutions and technologies based on resources and management systems that are adaptable by both rural and sub – urban people in a multitude of diverse environments and circumstances, and to produce results that are valid irrespective of prevailing ideologies because they are derived from fundamental human behaviour patterns.

The approach is interdisciplinary and combines the study of people, crops, plants, livestock, environment and their interactions with one another in the ecosystems. It embraces on ecosystems focus considering the stability, sustainability and equity of land use systems, in addition to their productivity. Social aspects are considered as thoroughly as ecological and economic aspects. Understanding existing knowledge can help determine whether alternatives from outside are appropriate, how they might be adopted and how best to introduce them. New technologies should usually build upon existing practices and knowledge. Thus, whenever technological solutions are proposed for the developing world, we should keep in mind the attendant risks, i.e. we should ensure that technology is congruent with man.

Neglect of value systems in pursuit of technological progress can be harmful and the maladaptation found to-day should remind us that physiological tensions and the excess of nationalism often arise as a result of a divorce between spiritual and material development. In other words, the salient problems of development are characterized by the difficulties not only in finding enough material resources but also matching them with specific cultural patters in given communities. For example, a project which aims to change the lifestyle of the nomadic Turkana tribe in Kenya by convincing them to take up the sedentary fishing industry will fail precisely because it does not build on the traditions and culture of the people. What they know and what they want to retain because every society is held by its own cultures and traditions.

The gap between the scientific understanding of Primary Healthcare (PHC) practices and other systems, and the site-specific understanding needed for the purposes of practical development might be effectively filled by making use of the knowledge already held by the communities themselves, as a result of managing their own health, their crops and animals.

However, it has been found that where indigenous and external knowledge systems come together, they may be assimilated into each other or practically isolated, but more commonly the indigenous knowledge is required and squeezed out. There is evidence that in many areas external aid has tended to shifle local innovativeness and understanding to produce dependant cultures, and under many circumstances this has led to the loss of useful understanding. However, even where no useful information is lost, replacing the one with the other fails to appreciate the cultural significance of much of indigenous knowledge.

To minister in another culture one must enter the culture-culture is a basic concept of sociology because it is what makes humans unique. Some people think of culture as the fine arts: music, operas, ballets, theatre. To the sociologist culture is used in amore encompassing way to include the entire way of life of people. All members of society are cultured – having distinctive language, food, dress, beliefs, customs and behaviour patterns –yet, within this large country with (forty three) different ethnic groups, there are different distinctive and unique ways of people in their groups in which ther exhibit their own language, food, dress, beliefs, religion, customs and behaviour patterns which has made them survive

Entering Another Culture

When an individual l leaves his or her own culture with its familiar customs, traditions, social patterns and way of life, the individual quickly begins to adjust on the new culture or tossed and buffered by it until he or she finally succumbs to extinction and suffocation.

A person will respond to a new culture in one or two ways: with empathy, acceptance and identification which will result in adjustment and success or with culture, shock or ultimate failure.

Often culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life; when we shake hands and what we say when we meet people, when and how to give tips, how to give orders to servants and workers, how to make purchases, when to accept and refuse invitations, when to take statements seriously and when not. Now these cues which may be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs or norms are acquired by all of us in the course of growing up and are as much part of our culture as the language we speak.

Now when an individual enters a strange culture, all or most of these familiar cues are removed.....No matter how broadminded or full of goodwill you may be, series of props have been knocked from under you, you may be followed by a feeling of frustration and anxiety.

Culture shock comes in in three stages: First is the fascination or tourist stage, which comes when the person enters the new culture.

There are new fascinating sights and sounds. There are exciting things to see and experience. There are usually friendly English (or other language) speaking people to help to see to one's comforts. The tourist or short term visitor or enthusiast usually never goes beyond this stage before leaving the culture.

The second stage is the rejection stage. The fan and fascination of the new culture begins to fade and the newcomer meets head-on the difficulties involved in living in the new culture. But now the "rules" of living are different, and the newcomer is not "in" on most of them. The way of doing things in the person's own culture may have been neat and logical but the ways of doing things in the new culture may seem capricious, without design or purpose. The newcomer becomes frustrated in attempting to function in the new culture by applying the "rules" of his or her own culture when these "rules" do not accomplish the desired results, and he or she begins to blame the new culture.

This rejection may take several forms, such as stereotyping members of the new culture, making derogatory and joking remarks about the people, dissociating oneself as much as possible with members of one's own culture. Most people make at least a partial recovery from culture shock. Those not able to accommodate themselves to the new culture eventually withdraw from it completely.

Sociological Enquiry

Often we draw conclusions about our world by making casual observations. For example, we ask friends for their opinion, we base our assumptions on the articles we read, we listen and watch newscasters and believe what "they" tell us. While such casual approaches seem helpful, there are more formal methods that sociologists use in research. Sociologists know that their studies are going to be scrutinized by other sociologists. Applying the philosophy of empiricism, to the investigation of human group behaviour is what distinguishes sociological scientific research to gather insights about a community, say, musicians.

The social sciences comprise a variety of disciplines whose purpose is to study the behaviour of man in society, social systems and institutions. These disciplines employ different scientific methods of investigations including those ordinary associated with the natural sciences. The social sciences share the fundamental purpose of all science which is the quest for an understanding of the real world about us. Such an understanding would be incomplete and not very meaningful without the understanding of individual and social behaviour. This human dimension constitutes a fundamental aspect of the reality we seek to unravel.

The study of technology in some of its vital aspects; falls within the scope of social analysis basically because there can be no "technology" without a social purpose. There is no standard definition of technology – Broadly speaking it may be described as that aspect of culture which encompasses the knowledge, skills, methods and tools which are applied in the production of human necessities. One fails all too often to appreciate the social dimension because technology is commonly equated with its material manifestation alone. Yet, the "hardware" aspect of technology is no more than the material outcome of the cumulative discoveries and experiences of man in the struggle for survival. These underlying processes appropriately constitute subjects of social analysis. Technology moreover is not only a product of culture but become a stimulus of socio-economic changes which again constitute essential dimensions of investigation by social scientists.

This conception of technology is especially important in the context of developing countries of Africa and other parts of the world. Technological change is expected to play a dynamic and pervasive role in the social and economic development of these countries. It should therefore be a basic function of the social scientist to better understand the manner and conditions under which technological change can play a more effective role in economic development. Related to this task is also the need to analyse the economic and social consequences of technological change, because, in spite of the positive connotation which is often attached to the term, a "new technology" might turn out to be highly inappropriate and might even have deleterious effects on human welfare. Indeed, it is the necessity to present such potential negative consequences which renders the role of the social scientists all the more important in technological development.

In spite of the basic conception expressed above, technology has for long been regarded as an "import" commodity of the developing countries of the world. It was assumed that the dominant methods of production employed in the developing countries were so backward that they would have to give way to the more modern technologies which have been developed in the economically advanced countries. Emphasis was there for placed on "technology transfer" from the industrialized to the developing countries.

It has now been realized however that the emphasis on technology transfer is a misplaced emphasis. It arises the assumption that technologies developed in and for the industrialized countries can be imported and directly applied to the production systems which prevail in the developing countries. This assumption was, of course, basically wrong. Technologies are generally developed in response to particular needs and to enhance productivity within a given socio-economic context. Each such technology therefore carries with it a "generic code" as it were, of the society within which it have evolved. It is therefore becoming difficult, if not impossible, to replicate the complex of socio-economic conditions which would permit the effective absorption of the imported technology. The most likely result of unquestioning importation and introduction of foreign technology is failure to achieve a "technological fit" with the potential negative socio-economic consequences. Perhaps the more fundamental issue has to do with the promotion of "endogenous development" of technology.

But Basic research is not sufficient by itself to achieve the mission. The results of Basic research by non-governmental organizations like THIN must be transformed into technologies that are within social acceptability framework, they must then be tested in the field for new scientific content, and finally they must be passed on to National Programmes for implementation. There is where complementary activities with partners who address the link between research and development. Research has been recognized in Kenya as an important input in National Social and Economic Development. Consequently, the Government has set up a Ministry dealing with Research, Science and Technology. Under the Ministry, there is the National Council of Science and Technology (NCST). By an amendment to the same Act, six other research institutes were established in the area of Industry, Agriculture, Fisheries and Marine resources, General medicine, Forestry and Trypanosomiasis (Sleeping sickness and Nagana). There are also a number of International Research Institutes and United Nations Agencies e.g. ILRI, ICIPE, WFR, etc. Finally there are research activities within universities' departments, institutes of technology, some Government departments and industry.

Unfortunately none of those institutions are doing serious research and community work to develop Traditional and Cultural Knowledge (including traditional medicines and healthcare and to help individual practitioners and healers to realize their relevance in society. There is no new institutions of learning generating knowledge about African peoples and ensuring that their knowledge becomes part of the curricula, there is no course in indigenous knowledge systems – either at B.A or Masters level in indigenous knowledge systems, neither is there any students doing doctorate in the same fields to get degrees that are relevant in terms of our country's social, economic orientations.

It is sad to find that many countries in the developing world are not making concerted efforts to ensure that development policies benefit the poorest members of society- through empowerment. This is happening because we have lost sight of the most important tenet of society – the community. Development organizations which seek to promote community development, these are charities in the real sense of the world, as they seek to empower and enable people to do things for themselves, rather than provide services and goods in a sustainable manner for the millions in need.

The fundamental and social research at THIN organization is opening new avenues and increasing the efficiency of low – cost effective, integrated health management strategies useful to the resource-poor rural and semi-urban communities, will be at hand.

THIN'S participatory learning, education and research-training priorities focuses on clarifying linkages between traditional and cultural practices, and heritages, conservation and poverty. The THINS integrated but functional programmes contribute to the development and transfer of diseases prevention, management and control and to help design appropriate technologies and policies, pathways and strategies in delivery of effective human, crop, livestock, environmental services and products in different productive systems for employment creation, incomes and profits, education, while promoting the traditional bonds of solidarity that have existed for centuries and giving science a meaning.

Indeed, these target health programmes that THIN has chosen for its priority attack are all challenges and issues that have already received considerable national, regional and international attention. Many of these have been the subject of practical control and eradication programmes on an extensive scale over the last several decades. If these were simple direct methods for the management and control of these serious dilemmas facing mankind and the increasing resistance to chemical treatment by disease causing pathogens, they would have been found in that time and put into operation.

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