

University of Nebraska - Lincoln  
**DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln**

---

Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)

Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

---

2-5-2018

# Public Libraries as Conduits for Indigenous Knowledge in South Africa

Maned Mhlongo

*Department of Information Science, University of South Africa, mhlonma@unisa.ac.za*

Patrick Ngulube

*School of Interdisciplinary Research and Graduate Studies, University of South Africa, ngulup@unisa.ac.za*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac>

 Part of the [Collection Development and Management Commons](#), and the [Information Literacy Commons](#)

---

Mhlongo, Maned and Ngulube, Patrick, "Public Libraries as Conduits for Indigenous Knowledge in South Africa" (2018). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 1757.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1757>

## Public Libraries as Conduits for Indigenous Knowledge in South Africa

### 1 Introduction

The dearth of indigenous knowledge (IK) in public libraries is affecting the accessibility of information to indigenous communities. Extant literature points to increasing awareness of the usefulness of IK in various aspects of the lives of communities (Agrawal 1995; Briggs 2005; Gorjestani 2000; Green 2007; 2012; Mercer et al 2010; Nakata 2002; Ngulube & Lwoga 2009; Ossai 2010; Ramphele 1998; Shange 2014; Sillitoe 2004). It is therefore important to ensure that IK is accessible for sustainability in communities.

Public libraries, as gateways to information and knowledge (UNESCO/IFLA 1994), should be at the forefront of facilitating access to all knowledge, including IK. In its key missions, the *UNESCO/IFLA Public Library Manifesto* (UNESCO/IFLA 1994) is explicit in recognising diversity in people in terms of their cultural and information needs. Key missions 7, 8 and 9 state that public libraries should:

- foster inter-cultural dialogue and favour cultural diversity;
- support oral traditions; and
- ensure access for citizens to all sorts of community information.

In South Africa, the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Republic of South Africa 1996) protects the rights of all citizens through the Bill of Rights. These rights include freedom of expression and access to information. In recognising that access to information and knowledge is a human right, public libraries need to facilitate the provision of IK as part of their broad mandate. Failure to provide IK would be tantamount to public libraries abdicating their constitutional mandate.

Part A of Schedule 5 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Republic of South Africa 1996) makes public libraries a provincial competency. This mandate presents itself against the historical backdrop of poor and, in some instances, non-existent library services for indigenous communities. Implied in the mandate is the transformation of public libraries and the need to provide client-centred services in a culturally and linguistically diverse country to advance social and economic

development, while redressing past inequalities. Provision of appropriate and inclusive services, including access to well-equipped public libraries, is an integral part of redress and transformation. As inequalities in service provision were inherent in the very nature of the apartheid regime which governed South Africa until 1994, post-1994 public libraries are obliged to ensure that their services are accessible and aligned to the needs of their communities, especially previously marginalised communities. Such alignment can be attained through a complete understanding of information needs of served communities. For example, in areas such as collection development and reference services, a deep insight into community needs, based on their ontological and epistemological positions is critical. In this way, libraries will be in a position to provide 'culturally responsive' services (Becvar & Srinivasan 2009). Public libraries need to be knowledgeable about the contextual offering of services related to the cultures and languages of their communities.

This paper is part of a larger study that sought to explore ways in which public libraries in South Africa can integrate indigenous knowledge into their services. Drawn from the larger study, the paper examines how public libraries in South Africa can enhance access to IK. In seeking to explore how libraries can facilitate access to IK, the paper addresses the following research questions:

- What do public librarians understand by indigenous knowledge?
- How can public libraries facilitate access to indigenous knowledge?

## **2 Contextual setting**

The mandate of the pre-1994 public library in South Africa was very different from the current directive because of varied legislative frameworks. Fragmentation and disparities in policies, service levels and clientele defined the public library of the time (Fourie 2007; Ralebipi-Simela 2007; Witbooi 2007). Efforts to address the disparities in the provision of public libraries began in earnest after the 1994 democratic elections. In terms of Part A of Schedule 5 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Republic of South Africa 1996), each of the nine newly formed provincial structures was mandated to put in place public libraries that are able to provide client-centred services, taking into consideration economic, cultural and linguistic diversities. This was in stark contrast to the previous dispensation where there were four provinces, each with a provincial library service, that supported pockets of affiliated libraries in

rural areas. Ethnic lines according to which the country was divided left some areas without services altogether, as they were part of homelands.<sup>1</sup> Homelands were supposed to provide their own library services. The amalgamation of library services post 1994 revealed that homelands did not have functional library services.

The library and information services sphere has seen a number of initiatives aimed at addressing past inequalities emerge. The National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS) was established in 2004 to advise the Minister of Arts and Culture about issues relating to library services in South Africa (Ralebipi-Simela 2007). The Public and Community Libraries Inventory of South Africa (PaCLISA), conducted between 2000 and 2004, provided “an exhaustive descriptive listing of South African public/community libraries” (Witbooi 2007:64). Additionally, the Department of Arts and Culture commissioned KPMG Services (Pty) Ltd and Jacaranda Intellectual Property Business Consultants to develop a funding model for public and community libraries (Department of Arts and Culture 2009; Witbooi 2007). Government allocated funds through the Department of Arts and Culture in the form of Public and Community Libraries Conditional Grants to all nine provincial library services. The grants were intended to support provinces achieve their mandate to provide public library services, as per Schedule 5 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Republic of South Africa 1996). These and other initiatives demonstrate the importance afforded to the need to redress past imbalances and provide equitable access to information services for all South Africans.

Newly created provinces faced challenges because of past imbalances in library provision. For provinces such as the Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape, which had existing library services, the challenge was expanding geographic coverage aimed at integrating former homeland libraries and extending boundaries to include areas occupied by other population groups. The provinces of the Eastern Cape, North West, Mpumalanga and Limpopo had to combine ‘homeland libraries’ to create new provincial libraries. The Northern Cape, as a newly created province, had to establish a new provincial library service.

---

<sup>1</sup> Also known as Bantustans, homelands were territories set aside for black South Africans based on their ethnicity.

It is within this context that the paper seeks to explore efforts to provide inclusive library services, with a particular focus on facilitating access to indigenous knowledge.

### **3 Literature review**

The review covers each of the study objectives. Within the context of this article, the focus of the literature review is therefore twofold; to explore understanding of IK and how such knowledge can be offered via existing public library services.

#### **3.1 Indigenous knowledge**

The lack of consistency around the term 'indigenous knowledge' has been pointed out in extant literature (for example, Battiste 2005; Hagar 2003; Ngulube & Onyancha 2011; Semali & Kincheloe 1999). Highlighting this situation, Semali and Kincheloe (1999:3) stated that indigenous knowledge

is an ambiguous topic that immediately places analysts on a dangerous terrain. Not only are scholars unsure what we're talking about, but many analysts are uncertain who should be talking about it.

Although time has elapsed since the above observation was made, skepticism regarding IK as 'true' knowledge continues (for example, Horsthemke 2004), with some scholars even warning against 'romanticising' it (Briggs 2005). The lack of consensus is attributed to, among other factors, the fact that arguments abound on what constitutes knowledge as well as agreeing on who is indigenous (Khupe 2014). The quest for defining IK continues, as demonstrated by Ngulube and Onyancha (2011) who identified as many as seventeen labels by which this kind of knowledge is referred to. Odora Hoppers (2002:2) uses the concepts 'indigenous knowledge systems' and 'traditional knowledge' interchangeably to refer to "the totality of all knowledges and practices, whether explicit or implicit, used in the management of socioeconomic, spiritual and ecological facets of life." Battiste (2005) posits that indigenous knowledge:

embodies a web of relationships within a specific ecological context; contains linguistic categories, rules, and relationships unique to each knowledge system; has localized content and meaning; has established customs with respect to acquiring and sharing of knowledge... and implies responsibilities for possessing various kinds of knowledge.

Articulating his conception of IKS, Ossai (2010) posits that they differ from Western knowledge systems because the former is “confined to specific areas” and suppressed in most parts of the world, while the latter has been made universal through education and is now entrenched in various world cultures. Using the terms indigenous knowledge and indigenous knowledge systems interchangeably, Ngulube, Dube and Mhlongo (2015:148) conceptualised IK as

tacit know-how that is community based, unique, complex, dynamic, eclectic, non-formal and transmitted from one generation to the next in various contexts (including cultural, ecological, economic, ethical, political, social, spiritual and technological) to support indigenous communities in solving problems and making decisions that are fundamental to their existence, survival and adaptation in their everyday direct interactions and transactions with their natural surroundings, the external world, and other worldviews and value systems in a particular geographical area.

Important aspects from the various definitions affirm IK as a philosophical stance, a conception of identity and part of the environment. Environment is used loosely to encompass socioeconomic, spiritual and ecological facets (Odora Hoppers 2002).

For purposes of this article, indigenous communities relate to groups of South Africans whose native language is neither English nor Afrikaans. These communities are mainly located in villages and rural areas of South Africa. Language has been used as a distinguishing variable to highlight the privileged position enjoyed by English and Afrikaans in the previous dispensation at the expense of other languages. The exclusion of the two mentioned language groups in the context of this paper is based on the view that in terms of library service provision in South Africa, English and Afrikaans have always been viewed favourably. Because of the critical role of language in the transmission of indigenous knowledge, the provision of services and materials in indigenous languages would be a significant tool for public libraries in providing access to IK.

### 3.2 Accessibility of public libraries

Linked to the second question, literature focusing on access to and the provision of services pertaining to IK requires exploration. The *IFLA/ UNESCO Public Library*

*Service Guidelines* (IFLA 2010) advocates the issue of access to public library services by all citizens. In the context of public libraries, access encompasses physical or intellectual accessibility. Physical access relates to the geographical proximity of libraries to communities, while intellectual access deals with content, language and formats of library materials. Reitz (2004:5) defines access as “the ease with which a person may enter a library... use its resources and obtain needed information regardless of format.” *The Library and Information Services Transformation Charter* (Department of Arts and Culture 2014:20) defines access as “the degree to which facilities and services of libraries are accessible by as many people as possible.” Access to information is one of the eight principles of the *White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery* (also known as *Batho Pele White Paper*) (Department of Public Service and Administration 1997) that should guide and ensure high quality service delivery to all citizens. The principle of access as proclaimed in the *Batho Pele White Paper* stipulates that all citizens should have equal access to services to which they are entitled.

Guided by the Batho Pele principle of access, libraries need to ensure that in cases where the location of services is geographically far from intended beneficiaries, they make provision to facilitate access. Hart (2010) notes that there does not seem to be a common understanding of what ‘access’ is about. For example, in her research in South Africa, Hart (2010) ponders the question and concludes that, apart from geographic access, which still seems to be a challenge, an understanding of the information need of rural communities whose access to information is the focus, is still lacking. If libraries are not physically accessible to communities, then public libraries are failing in their mission. Community members should have a choice of utilising public library services. The absence of such a choice implies continued marginalisation and a disregard for constitutional requirements; therefore geographical location should not preclude access to libraries. From an intellectual and cultural perspective, libraries are negatively perceived as places for the “educated elite” and thus a luxury (Department of Arts and Culture 2014). This perception renders library services inaccessible to potential users who may feel that the library does not have anything to offer them. The onus is on libraries to quell any negative perceptions about their role, by, for example, including IK as part of the services they provide.

At the heart of public library service provision is the availability of suitable material for different user communities. Suitability of material considers the appropriateness of content, language as well as format for user communities. The availability of different material formats provides libraries with opportunities to cater for varying needs and to explore ways of infusing orality as part of their services. Orality would specifically be suitable for integrating indigenous knowledge. Hart (2010) also raises the issue of poor library usage by adults, despite assertions that public libraries are accessible to all. It is crucial that public libraries embark on a continuous process of examining the profiles of their users in earnest, especially where communities engage in a high level of migration. The important question in this regard is whether libraries are ready to explore the possibility of integrating indigenous knowledge, which has been marginalised from time immemorial, into their services because this, the researcher contends, could contribute towards enhancing service relevance.

Regarding language, availability of library materials in indigenous languages has been cause for concern, and a number of contributory factors have been identified (Fredericks & Mvunelo 2003; Ngulube 2012; Prah 2007; Rodrigues, Jacobs & Cloete 2006). Despite the adoption of the *National Language Policy Framework* (Department of Arts and Culture 2002), there is still a paucity of materials in indigenous languages (Department of Arts and Culture 2014; Fredericks & Mvunelo 2003). Prah (2007) maintains that the prevailing attitude of viewing English as a language of power does not augur well for indigenous languages. Adding to the challenges facing the promotion of indigenous languages is the reluctance of publishers to publish materials written in indigenous language because of poor sales potential (Fredericks & Mvunelo 2003; Ngulube 2012). As one of the strategies to deal with the predicament of scarcity of indigenous language material, Ngulube (2012) challenges public libraries to go beyond their traditional role of being information providers and take part in content creation as a way of addressing the deficit.

Libraries need to be cognisant of the appropriateness of media and formats in which information is made available. Public libraries rely on printed media which can sometimes exclude people with low literacy levels (Jiyane & Mostert 2008; Leach 2001). In his study of information provision by non-governmental organisations, Leach (2001:178) cited a respondent who views verbal information provision as a “shared process so we see ourselves as gaining information as much as we share information.”



Jiyane and Mostert (2008) made a similar observation in their study on rural women entrepreneurs. These women prefer word of mouth as an information provision medium. This insight into the need for other types of information formats has the potential to contribute positively to the provision of IK at public libraries. This is an important factor in providing responsive and appropriate services and is likely to go a long way in improving the plight of indigenous communities who, apart from having to contend with print media, also have to deal with languages that are foreign to them.

The *Library and Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter* (Department of Arts and Culture 2009; 2014) asserts that one of the challenges facing the sector is “insufficient information resources in indigenous languages.” The situation is aggravated by the content that is not always appropriate for the intended users. The enormity of the situation is lamented in the Charter:

... LIS [library and information services] are probably viewed by most as irrelevant collections of books for the educated and middle class. The question confronting the LIS sector is: How can South Africans value something they have no access to and no use for?” (Department of Arts and Culture 2009: xx).

Considering the issues raised in the preceding discussion, how then can libraries become conduits for indigenous knowledge?

## **4 Methodology**

Methodology constitutes conceptual and philosophical assumptions, the research approach, and the adopted research design. Adopting an interpretative lens, this qualitative multiple case study sought to explore how public libraries can facilitate access to indigenous knowledge.

### **4.1 Population and data collection**

The population for the study included the nine provincial library services in South Africa. These provincial libraries serve 1 612 public and community libraries in terms of Part A, Schedule 5 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Department of Arts and Culture 2015). In addition to the provincial library services, South Africa currently has eight metropolitan library services that serve 281 public libraries within their constituencies. However, metropolitan library services were not considered because of their diverse user groups which, at times, necessitate the predominance of

languages other than indigenous languages. It is important within the context of this paper to be cognisant of the strong link between language and IK, as indicated in the extant literature (Magwa 2010; Motsaathebe 2010; Monaka & Mutula 2010; Odora Hoppers 2002; Seema 2012; Semali & Kincheloe 1999).

Two main criteria were used for purposefully selecting participants. Provinces were identified in terms of the predominance of indigenous languages. *Census 2011* (Statistic South Africa 2012) was used in determining predominant languages per province. The second criterion was participants' willingness to participate. Out of the nine provinces, three did not fit the profile in terms of indigenous language predominance. The other two who met this criterion did not give consent. Thus, four provinces, namely, Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and North West, met the two requirements. As the study was exploratory, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four directors and/or managers of provincial library services over a six-month period. Other stakeholders were not included in the data collection process. Interviews were recorded by the researcher who interviewed all the participants. Services of a transcriber were sourced to transcribe all interviews. Transcripts were sent to participants for validation, as suggested in the literature (Bryman 2012; Miles & Huberman 1994).

#### 4.2 Data analysis

At the beginning of the analysis, *a priori* concepts derived from the research questions were used as codes. An open mind ensured the identification of additional emergent codes linked to relevant literature, as suggested in the literature (Attride-Stirling 2001; Miles & Huberman 1994; Rule & John 2011). At the initial stage of coding, little emphasis was put on the interconnectedness of codes (Friese 2014; Miles & Huberman 1994). This aspect of coding resulted in what Ayres, Kavanaugh and Knafel (2003) refer to as the decontextualisation of data. Unlike case-by-case analysis where context is maintained, decontextualisation of data facilitates the establishment and development of themes or patterns from the codes. Data was recontextualised during the presentation and discussion of findings. Refining codes entailed grouping of codes and merging related ones to render the analysis manageable.

The second level of coding involved the grouping of codes into themes or patterns, which Atlas.ti refers to as families. Further refinement guided by research objectives

resulted in the identification of eight themes or families. This article focuses on two of the eight themes in line with the purpose.

## 5 Findings and discussions

Understanding and interpretation of IK varied and covered aspects such as history and culture. However, overlaps in the articulation were also noted. Regarding access, the main finding is that some rural communities still do not have easy access to libraries, despite government efforts to make libraries accessible. Factors contributing to the situation include the physical geography of some areas, coupled with poor infrastructure. Responses of the four participants, referred to as participants A, B, C and D, were in line with anonymity and confidentiality undertakings during data collection.

### 5.1 Understanding and interpretation of indigenous knowledge

The first research question was: What do public librarians understand by indigenous knowledge? The question sought to determine librarians' articulation of indigenous knowledge based on the various definitions of the concepts, as indicated in extant literature. The value of determining this understanding is that it might inform decisions on what aspects of IK libraries could focus on in facilitating access to indigenous knowledge. Table 1 presents aspects of IK as articulated by each participant.

Table 1: Understanding of IK

Understanding and interpretations of IK			
Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stories from old people</li> <li>- Undocumented knowledge</li> <li>- Local history</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local oral history pertaining to chiefs</li> <li>- Local history</li> <li>- Folklore</li> <li>- Customs</li> <li>- Oral tradition</li> <li>- Knowledge of old people</li> <li>- Arts and culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- History</li> <li>- Culture</li> <li>- Customs</li> <li>- Traditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rituals</li> <li>- Undocumented traditional ways of doing things</li> <li>- Knowledge in peoples' heads</li> <li>- Documented and undocumented knowledge</li> </ul>

Participants A, B and C mentioned the historical aspect of IK. Participants A and B overlapped with Participant D by referring to the oral or undocumented nature of IK. Interestingly, the association of IK with tradition or old people featured in the responses of all four participants. Also of note is the level of detail per participant when articulating their understanding of IK. It appears as though each participant responded in accordance with what was happening in their contexts during the data collection period, as will be clarified later.

Participant A's response on what constitutes IK was rather concise as she stated:

*... getting stories from the old people... that local history thing...*

The participant went further to say:

*It's undocumented knowledge.*

In what appeared to be clarification about the operational context, Participant B stated:

*The provincial library services is currently under the Department of Culture, Arts and Traditional Affairs...*

*Our current MEC - it goes with them coming up with a vision - but remember now we are sitting with Traditional Affairs as one of our components of the department and Traditional Affairs exists to support chiefs.*

In line with the roles of the Department, the participants reported that the library had received a directive from the Member of the Executive Council (MEC), who is the provincial political head to whom the library is accountable, to:

*Go and record the stories of [chiefs] and put it in the library. Their tradition, their music, their folklores, customs ...everything that defines and tells of their history - where they come from and who they are ...and that history must be in libraries.*

Furthermore, Participant B also pointed out that:

*...the arts and culture part of the community is very strong.*

Highlighting the contextual nature of IK, Participant B declared:

*When you record information about [name of place] then the recording will be kept in the provincial library services. When other libraries are interested... but remember it's possible that if you take information from this library to another one it will not make sense there...*

Participant C did not have much to say in terms of articulating what IK is. The brief response leaned towards history and culture, and was expressed in these words:

*Research about, you know, about things such as kingdoms and customs and traditions.*

The response of Participant D emphasised the cultural aspects, whilst alluding to the tacit nature of IK:

*To me IK is about how people have always done things. For example, our rituals, for example how to make [maize bread], how we have always done certain things, not just African and others you know - Afrikaans people making biltong, like that. It's not just [about] food. It's a lot of other cultural activities which in most cases is not recorded anywhere. So, as far as I understand, it's making that knowledge that is out there in people's heads on how they do things, which is possibly documented or undocumented.*

Responses point to the need for deep understanding of each community in order to ensure contextualised access to IK. Lack of consistency in defining IK, as pointed out in the literature (Ngulube & Onyancha 2011), was still evident. Context appears to play an important role in the articulation of what constitutes IK. Looking at the level of detail provided by each participant, it appears as though, in some provinces, the issue of IK had been raised, while in others very little had actually transpired, gauging from the scant details provided by participants. However, there could be other contributing factors, such as the experience of participants, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Despite their contextual descriptions, participants were of the view that IK needs to be captured and made available in libraries. In line with their interpretations, various methods of capturing and formats of making it available were envisaged.

## 5.2 Accessibility of indigenous knowledge

The second question explored ways in which libraries can facilitate accessibility to IK, focusing on two aspects, namely physical proximity of libraries to served communities and library collections. Physical accessibility of public libraries underpins any efforts to embark on and provide inclusive services. It is in light of this view that the question was asked.

Participants acknowledged the contribution of the Conditional Grant in making libraries accessible. Responses to the issue of access included physical location of communities, poor infrastructure, inappropriate content, poor readership among indigenous communities, and the paucity of indigenous language materials.

### 5.2.1 Proximity of libraries to communities

Some rural areas are hard to reach, thus rendering access to libraries problematic. Describing such a situation, Participant A had this to say:

*You will find that it's a hill, and there are communities' downhill, so it is not easy to reach there, without a special vehicle. The issue of the [physical] nature of our province is a challenge because you are unable to reach areas and as a result, there are challenges for our libraries.*

The situation described above points to infrastructural challenges, which were also affirmed by Participant B thus:

*...a village somewhere, hey when you drive there you close your eyes! You get into gravel roads that's what makes you feel... you feel very hurt like to say honestly, you still have people and they are living there ... and we call them roads?*

An additional impediment to accessibility was the mushrooming of informal settlements, as explained by Participant C:

*According to the policies, the community should be able to walk to the library. It should not be further than 12 km. You know that is the walking distance...the longest walking distance that people can walk. However, it is a situation that is very difficult to actually implement. Right now, we are trying because so far, we've got one library per township. Townships are very far from the town and*

*sometimes they [people] don't have transport. Townships are also growing. The library is built here in the middle so that all the communities can... all the communities that are around that center can access it, but now look at this township, for an example, which will be growing further...shacks keep on growing... keep on mushrooming every now and again and again.*

Municipalities were seen to be playing an important role in facilitating access to libraries because of their proximity to communities. Some municipalities had been providing such services prior to the new dispensation and were therefore viewed as valuable partners because of their experience. In this context, the constitutional mandate of provinces posed logistical challenges. For example, distances between provincial library services, which are the headquarters of community libraries, sometimes impact negatively on service delivery. Voicing this sentiment, Participant C gave this example:

*...whenever there is a problem there, the pipe has burst in the library, you have to come from head office and deal with that. and they say, if it was at local level then we have agreed that you know the municipality will deal with those things immediately.*

The above responses demonstrate challenges that communities still have to contend with and point to the need for libraries to devise strategies of reaching out so as to provide inclusive services. Collaboration between provincial structures and municipalities seems like a strategic move that can enhance the accessibility of libraries. Ensuring physical accessibility is a step towards integrating IK.

### 5.2.2 Library collections

Regarding library collections, the question sought to understand the range of subjects covered, and languages and formats in which materials are available. Library collections should reflect user groups in all respects. Findings indicate that, because of the high number of learners and higher education students, libraries tend to acquire materials that support the information needs of these user groups. As can be expected from any public library, fiction also features prominently. In terms of formats, print material, audio-visual and electronic materials were identified as forming part of library collections. As far as language coverage was concerned, there appears to be an awareness for the need to include indigenous language materials, although

participants asserted that there were challenges regarding availability. Responses to the question on library collections are presented.

Participant B described the subject coverage thus:

*[We have] study guides for school children, most is science ja, mathematics...books in management. We also have [books on] human resource and business management.*

Responding to subject coverage for indigenous communities who were previously marginalised, Participant B voiced misgivings on relevance of content and argued:

*You can find that most of the materials that we have in terms of content is not talking to them. This is why we have to be creative and find ways to respond to that.*

*We are not practicing African librarianship. Even the programs that we are running in our libraries they are not original, they do not address the African needs. If I may put it that way. When I talk about African librarianship I am talking about librarianship which will put... which will bring also you know together the European and the African needs of the community...I have not thought about the actual activities yet but I'm thinking. I'm still thinking that look... that it's something that needs to be introduced.*

The issue of indigenous languages materials received considerable attention from participants. Apparently, the issue of predominant languages was not as clear-cut, because in some provinces there were 'pockets' of communities that did not necessarily belong to the province's predominant language group. For example, in the Eastern Cape and in KwaZulu-Natal, there were areas where Sesotho was predominant, despite the fact that isiXhosa and isiZulu were cited as predominant in these provinces, respectively (Statistics South Africa 2011). North West, a predominantly Setswana-speaking province, has mining areas with migrant workers who speak languages other than Setswana. Participants pointed out the need to cater for such communities.

Participant A explained how they deal with the issue of various languages:



*When we buy books, we mix while focusing on the language based on that community.*

Participant B explains how, at provincial government level, they are supposed to deal with the situation:

*As a province, we have five official languages, which they say whatever you do, try and make sure that you cover these languages. I think then it's Afrikaans, English, Setswana then I think there is isiXhosa then the other one I can't remember I think it's Sesotho.*

Participant C stated:

*In terms of our [collection development] policy, we are procuring material written in indigenous languages.*

Participant D had this to say:

*We are getting indigenous language material. We buy whatever is out there that meets our selection criteria in terms of the quality of printing and binding etc. but that's not a lot to be honest.*

Among factors contributing to poor availability of indigenous language material, was the reluctance of established publishers to publish indigenous language materials because of low sales potential. The few indigenous language writers face a dilemma in that publishing is very expensive, and their work often gets rejected by established publishers. Contributing to the problem is the poor readership in indigenous languages, something that discourages both indigenous language writers and publishers to write and publish, respectively. Participant A stated:

*There are very few writers in indigenous languages.... very few. They like to self-publish.*

Participant B surmised that it is more lucrative for local writers to write in English rather than their own languages, observing that:

*People who read [local languages] are few but if you write that book in English, it is going to sell. It can be sold from Giyani to Cape Town<sup>2</sup>.*

*The publishing industry...I don't think it's kind to our poor, small self-publishing community.*

Participant C pointed out that:

*...most of the material in indigenous languages is written by local writers who actually do not have enough money for publishing professionally.*

Participant D had this to say:

*In terms of supply, there's not much because some people who are in publishing they will say they will publish what will make money. They will publish what they will send to the Department of Education, you know for set work because if they publish a lot in indigenous languages who's gonna buy it?*

A matter of concern raised by participants was the issue of quality of indigenous language materials. Commenting on the issues, Participant A said:

*Books have to be reviewed. It goes through certain steps before it can pass to say this no, this is ready to be published... so we have those challenges. We can't buy something that is not of quality.*

Still on quality, Participant B had this to say:

*You need to have big glasses to be able to read the print... and then the papers are just falling apart!*

Participant C asserted:

*Through self-publishing, we find that there's lack of quality in terms of their material. Whenever they submit them to us, we have to first evaluate them to check whether they are up to standard.*

In some cases, efforts are in place to facilitate availability of indigenous language materials. Participant C reported that Language Services, which is part of the

---

<sup>2</sup> Metaphorical use of two places that are far apart to indicate wide readership

department, edits work by local writers in efforts to improve quality. Intentional efforts to procure materials from local writers are being made despite concerns regarding the culture of reading among indigenous communities. Articulating the concern, Participant C commented thus:

*we still have a challenge that our people are not reading, though as library service we are transforming by promoting writing in [indigenous language] so that there can be more material but then the usage of books comes back to not... there are low reading levels in our Black communities.*

It is encouraging that libraries seem to recognise the need to promote and make indigenous language materials available. It is through sustaining indigenous languages that indigenous knowledge is likely to survive. Content seems to be a challenge because of the focus of public libraries on education at the expense of other aspects. Public libraries are serving the needs of actual users, with no effort to attract potential users by including content that addresses needs of indigenous communities who are not typical library users. The implications of this situation for indigenous communities who do not see the relevance of libraries are dire because it perpetuates marginalisation.

#### Format of library materials

In terms of format, the four participating libraries affirmed that collections come in a variety of formats. In addition to books, formats such as digital versatile discs (DVDs), compact discs (CDs) and electronic books (e-books) formed part of the collections of the selected libraries.

The close working relationship between libraries and archives proves to provide an option for partnerships in knowledge creation and preservation. Participants agree on the contributory role that archives can play in this regard. Making the point, Participant B reported:

*I requested archives, because archives go around in all the villages collecting indigenous knowledge. But then I always encouraging my colleague there that he must make sure that those..., that knowledge ends up in books and they can go into the library not only in archives.*

Response of participants indicated the involvement of librarians working with communities as well as library users.

The issue of concern, however, is what public libraries offer to adult indigenous community members. What do public libraries do to attract potential users who do not see the relevance of libraries in their lives?

Writing in indigenous languages, and recording of events dealing with customs and oral histories were viewed as possible ways of making IK available and accessible. References to the paucity of indigenous language reading material (Fredericks & Mvunelo 2003; Ngulube 2012) implied that, in participants' view, increased availability of such material might contribute to the transmission and preservation of IK. However, there does not seem to be much emphasis on revisiting content or information provided by libraries. Information content is crucial in addressing the principle of 'every user his/her book', as proposed by Ranganathan (1988).

## **6 Conclusions and recommendations**

Accessibility of libraries to indigenous communities has a historical context, as discussed in the contextual background. There seems to be concerted efforts to make libraries and information accessible to communities. However, in terms of IK, a number of concerns are at play. For example, libraries continue to apply traditional methods of collection development which, some extent, disregard indigenous knowledge. Libraries still seem to be predominantly associated with the printed word. Although reading plays a critical role in the information and knowledge era, the authors argue that some communities will continue to be marginalised unless orality becomes part of library services. In a country as diverse as South Africa, it is important for libraries to have a paradigm shift in order to remain relevant, while addressing needs of communities that are not accustomed to reading. Because IK is orally transmitted, libraries, in their collection development endeavours, should be cognisant of this imperative and devise ways of harnessing it. Including IK in libraries provides opportunities for libraries to reposition themselves to be aligned with the needs of indigenous communities who would otherwise not see their relevance. Such repositioning can increase library usage.

The limitation identified by the researcher was that due to the exploratory nature of the study, potential library users did not feature in the process, thus inadvertently perpetuating the perception that the library is for the select.

Further research on how libraries can facilitate IK is necessary. Data collection for this paper was confined to library directors and/or managers of the four selected provincial libraries. The paucity of studies on integration measures in South Africa rendered it necessary to start exploring from the level of senior management. It would be useful to delve deeper and seek views of librarians who work directly with indigenous communities as well as communities themselves in order to obtain a better understanding of issues in order to make informed decisions for making IK accessible.

## References

Agrawal, A. (1995). Dismantling the divide between indigenous and western knowledge. *Development and Change*, 26(3), 413-439.

Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 1(3), 385-405.

Ayres, L., Kavanaugh, K. & Knafelz, K. A. (2003). Within-case and cross-case approaches to qualitative data analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 13(6), 871-833. DOI: 10.1177/1049732303255359

Battiste, M. (2005). Indigenous Knowledge: Foundations for First Nations. *World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) Journal*. Retrieved from <http://multiworldindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Indigenous-Knowledge-Foundations-for-First-Nations13.pdf>

Becvar, K. & Srinivasan, R. (2009). Indigenous knowledge and culturally responsive methods in information research. *Library Quarterly*, 79(4), 421-441.

Briggs, J. (2005). The use of indigenous knowledge in development: problems and challenges. *Progress in Development Studies*, 5(2):99-114. Retrieved from <http://pdj.sagepub.com/contetn/5/2/99>

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*. (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Department of Arts and Culture. (2002). *National Language Policy Framework*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Department of Arts and Culture. (2009). *The Library and Information Services Transformation Charter*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Department of Arts and Culture. (2014). *The Library and Information Services Transformation Charter*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Department of Arts and Culture. (2015). *The State of Libraries in South Africa*. (IFLA ed.). Pretoria.

Department of Public Service and Administration. (1997). *White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele White Paper)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Fourie, I. (2007). Public libraries addressing social inclusion: how we may think... World Library and Information Congress: 73<sup>rd</sup> IFLA General Conference and Council, 19-23 August 2007, Durban, South Africa. Retrieved from <http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm>

Fredericks, G.H. & Mvunelo, Z. (2003). Publishing of books in indigenous South Africa languages and their availability and use in public libraries. *South African Journal of Library and Information Science*, 69(2), 133-139.

Friese, S. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis with Atlas.ti*. (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE E-book

Gorjestani, N. (2000). Indigenous knowledge for development: opportunities and challenges. A presentation at the UNCTAD Conference on Traditional Knowledge, Geneva, November 1. Retrieved, April 14, 2014 from [http://worldbank.org/afr/ik/ikpapeer\\_0102.pdf](http://worldbank.org/afr/ik/ikpapeer_0102.pdf).

Green, L. J. F. (2012). Beyond South Africa's 'indigenous knowledge-science' wars. *South African Journal of Science*, 108 (7/8). Retrieved October 15, 2012 from [www.sajs.co.za](http://www.sajs.co.za).

Green, L. J. F. (2007). The *Indigenous Knowledge Systems Policy* of 2004: challenges for South African universities. *Social Dynamics*, 33 (1), 130-154.

Hagar, C. (2003). *Sharing indigenous knowledge: to share or not to share?: that is the question. Proceedings of the Canadian Association for Information Science Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia*, pp. 336-347.

Hart, G. (2010). New vision, new goals, new markets?: reflections on a South African case of community library services. *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science*, 76(2), 81-90.

Horsthemke, K. (2004). 'Indigenous knowledge' - conceptions and misconceptions. *Journal of Education*, 34, 31-48.

IFLA/UNESCO. (2010). *IFLA Public library service guidelines*. (2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed.). The Hague: International Federation of Library Associations.

Jiyane, G. V. & Mostert, B. J. (2008). The role of the public library in economic empowerment and poverty alleviation among informal sector women entrepreneurs – a preliminary in the Umhlatuze Municipality. *Mousaion*, 26(2), 79-97.

Khupe, C. (2014). Indigenous knowledge and school science: possibilities for integration. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, Thesis: Doctor of Philosophy.

Leach, A. (2001). Information provision in a rural context: the perspectives of rural adults and some implications for rural library and information services. *South African Journal for Library and Information Science*, 67 (2), 51-62.

Magwa, W. (2010). Revisiting the language question in Zimbabwe: a multilingual approach to the language in education policy. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 5(2), 157-168.

Mercer, J. et al. (2010). Framework for integrating indigenous and scientific knowledge for disaster risk reduction. *Disasters*, 34(1), 214–239. doi:10.1111/j.0361-3666.2009.01126.x

Miles, B.M. & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: an expanded sourcebook*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Monaka, K.C. & Mutula, S. M. (2010). An inclusive linguistic framework for Botswana: reconciling the state and perceived marginalized communities. *Journal of Information, Information Technology, and Organizations*, 5, 51-65.

Motsaathebe, G. (2010). Language, Afrikology and the tremor of the political moment: English as a main language of discourse in Africa. *Indilinga – African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 9 (1), 96-109.

Nakata, M. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and the cultural interface: underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems. *IFLA Journal*, (5/6), 281-291.

Ngulube, P. (2012). Revitalising and preserving endangered indigenous languages in South Africa through writing and publishing. *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science*, 78(1), 11-24.

Ngulube, P. & Lwoga, E. T. 2009. Managing agricultural indigenous and exogenous knowledge through information and communication technologies for poverty reduction in Tanzania. *Indilinga-African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 8(1), 95-113.

Ngulube, P. & Onyanha O. B. (2011). What's in a name? Using informetric techniques to conceptualize the knowledge of traditional and indigenous communities. *Indilinga – African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 10 (2), 129-152.



Ngulube, P., Dube, L. & Mhlongo, M. (2015). Towards a cartography of indigenous knowledge systems in library and information science training and education in Anglophone Eastern and southern Africa. *Indilinga-African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 14(2), 145-168.

Odora Hoppers, C. A. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and the integration of knowledge systems: towards a conceptual and methodological framework. In C. A. Odora Hoppers (Ed.), *Indigenous knowledge and the integration of knowledge systems: towards a philosophy of articulation*. Claremont: New Africa Books, pp. 2-22.

Ossai, N. B. (2010). African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS), *Simbiosis*, 7(2), 1-13.

Prah, K. K. (2007). *Challenges to the promotion of indigenous languages in South Africa: review commissioned by the Foundation for Human Rights in South Africa. October-November 2006*. Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society.

Ralebipi-Simela, M. D. (2007). National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS). In T. Bothma, P. Underwood and P. Ngulube (Eds.), *Libraries for the future: progress and development of South African libraries*. Pretoria: Library and Information Association of South Africa, pp. 169-178.

Ramphela, M. (1998). Women's indigenous knowledge: building bridges between the traditional and the modern, in *Indigenous knowledge: local pathways to global development: marking five years of the World Bank indigenous knowledge for development program*. Retrieved from <http://worldbank.org/afr/ik/default.htm>.

Ranganathan, S. R. (1988). *The five laws of library science*. Bangalore: Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science.

Reitz, J. M. (2004). Online dictionary for library and information science. Westport: Libraries Unlimited. Retrieved from <http://lu.com/odlis/index.cfm>

Republic of South Africa. (1996). *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Pretoria.

Rodrigues, A., Jacobs, L. & Cloete, L. (2006). Providing equitable public library services to South Africa's multicultural communities. *Mousaion*, 24(2), 211-231.

Rule, P. & John, V. (2011). *Your guide to case study research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Seema, J. (2012). The significance of philosophy of development as expressed in their proverbs. *Indilinga – African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 11 (1), 128-137.

Semali, L. M. & Kincheloe, J. L. (1999). Introduction: What is indigenous knowledge and why should we study it? In L.M. Semali & J.L. Kincheloe (Eds.). *What is indigenous knowledge? : Voices from the academy*. New York: Falmer Press, 3-57.

Shange, J. (2014). Integration of indigenous knowledge and skills for the development of rural women in Kwazulu-Natal. *Indilinga – African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 13(1), 106-125.

Sillitoe, P. (2004). Interdisciplinary experiences: working with indigenous knowledge in development. *Interdisciplinary science reviews*, 29(1), 6-23.

Statistics South Africa. (2012). *Census 2011*. Pretoria.

UNESCO/ IFLA. (1994). *Public Library Manifesto*. The Hague: IFLA.

Witbooi, S. L. (2007). Current developments in public libraries in South African. In T. Bothma, P. Underwood & P. Ngulube (Eds.). *Libraries for the future: Progress and Development of South African Libraries*. Pretoria: LIASA, pp. 61-70.