

Tim Hart and Ineke Vorster, *Indigenous Knowledge on the South African Landscape: Potentials for Agricultural Development*, Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa, 200.p.52. ISBN 978-07969-2162-8.

Reviewed by: Percyslage Chigora

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) has since gained ground as one of the stepping-stones in some developing countries for promoting development. This traditional knowledge, which has existed for many centuries or has emerged as a result of the adaptation to the environment that takes place continuously, has shaped development in developing societies today. The occasional paper, entitled “Indigenous Knowledge on South African Landscape: A Potential for Agriculture Development” is well intentioned to analyze how Indigenous Knowledge (IK) has, and can, be used to enhance agricultural development.

Tim Hart and Ineke Vorster, with a strong background in research and specialists in agricultural development, are well qualified to unlock the issues of IK in the agricultural sector, being informed by continued slow growth and stagnation in African agriculture, particularly for those that use conventional wisdom. The authors questioned the conventional wisdom of ‘input-output’ on agricultural development and highlighted the need to holistically look at the cause of the failed development in many development interventions. They explained the various types of agricultural practices: distinguishing industrial agricultures, green revolution agriculture, and resource poor agriculture. The nature of agriculture in South Africa, in which issues of race and gender are dominant, were exposed as well as a comparison of Africa’s smaller land holders and those from developed world of North America and Europe was offered.

A good conceptual analysis of Indigenous Knowledge was provided and parameters for its understanding as well as historical development were outlined and also noting of its centrality in

agricultural development. An overview of the state of research in IK in South Africa was given to which the authors highlighted that:

‘To argue that the significance of indigenous knowledge in agriculture is not receiving attention in South Africa would be incorrect. Rather we would argue that it is not receiving enough attention, nor is it receiving the right attention’ .p.16.

In detail the authors dwelt on examples of the use of IK in South African agriculture. Issues of chicken rearing, protection of sorghum seeds, growing of pumpkins, maize seedlings production, African vegetables, collective grazing and exportation of delicious fruits were explained.

The last section addressed policy considerations in using IK in agricultural development. Issues that need to be addresses in order for IK to contribute to agricultural development were discussed in detail. In essence the authors highlighted that:

‘...there is need to move beyond the research practices that predominately focus on medicinal plants and thereby support on export driven economy. We need to focus attention on agricultural and other policies that promote food security for more than a mere handful of individual who benefit from current export of crops known for hierarchical properties’ .p.38.

I find this occasional paper quite informative and highly recommended for those in the development discourse, particularly those in the use of indigenous knowledge in promoting agricultural development and food security. The work is a good entry point for those who would want carry out an intensive and deeper analysis of IK in South Africa’s agricultural sector.

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