

Management of indigenous knowledge in Sri Lanka, with special reference to indigenous medicine

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Abstract

Communities in Sri Lanka own a remarkable fund of under-utilized, under-appreciated, and unidentified indigenous knowledge and skills, which mostly become obsolete or extinct due to various reasons. The indigenous knowledge (IK) system, particularly in medicine, mainly remains of a tacit nature. Therefore, managing indigenous knowledge of indigenous medicine is a great challenge. It is believed that economic independence and sustainability can be achieved through a hybrid system of development by amalgamating existing IK and modern technologies. The management of IK will revalidate the dying cultures and promote community-based involvement in development programmes of a country. The objectives of the study were to identify existing formats of IK on indigenous medicine, available policies to manage IK of indigenous medicine, and barriers to manage IK of the indigenous medicine in Sri Lanka. Government institutions such as departments, universities, museums, and libraries have a moral responsibility to identify, collect, preserve, and disseminate indigenous knowledge for the benefit of the local and global community. The selected institutional heads and librarians of the most relevant government institutes in the country represented the target population of the study and the data collection was done through documentary survey, interviews and observations. The study identified much valuable tangible and intangible IK of indigenous medicine, scattered throughout the country. Ola-leaf manuscripts are identified as the basic written format of IK of indigenous medicine, while the rest of the knowledge remains as personnel memories. Government intervention, and formulation and implementation of policies and strategies for the management of IK, were the fundamental recommendations made based on findings of the study, whereas active collaboration among related institutes was considered the second. The potential of information and communication technologies was recognized in the process of IK management.

Keywords

indigenous knowledge, indigenous medicine, knowledge management, Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Overview of indigenous knowledge (IK)

Communities in most countries inherit their own knowledge systems, called indigenous knowledge (IK). A knowledge system of that nature can be considered as the national heritage of the country. The terms ‘indigenous knowledge’ (IK), ‘traditional knowledge’ (TK), and ‘local knowledge’ are used interchangeably all over the world.

IK is local knowledge unique to a given culture or a society. It forms the basis for decision-making in local

contexts of agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural resource management and a host of other activities in rural communities (UNESCO, 2017). IK is a complete body of knowledge, expertise and practices, maintained and developed generally by people in rural areas, who have extended histories of

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