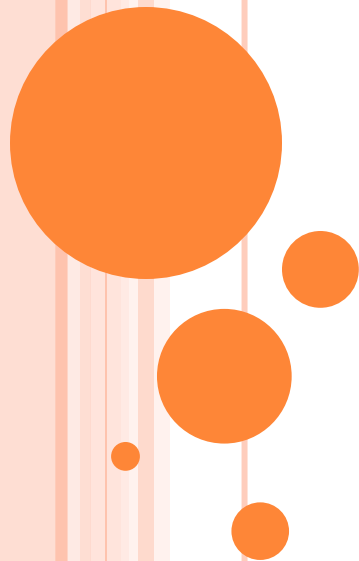


# **CULTURAL INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN GHANA:**

## **BACK TO PROVERBIAL WISDOM**

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**Inter University Centre, Dubrovnik  
27 September – 1 October**



# INTRODUCTION

- “If you are kind to your in-laws you will get to sleep with your wife’s sister”
- Proverb spoken at focus group discussion soliciting indigenous knowledge on natural resources



# RADIO PROGRESS



## COMPELLING TRANSPARENCY

- Deeper meaning revealed land transaction with mining company
- Radio series demanded more information
- Radio station led advocacy
- Change in community action plan



# TAPPING ANCIENT WISDOM IN TIMES OF CRISES

It is no taboo to return and fetch it when you forget; you can always undo mistakes



## SANKOFA IN ACADEMIA

- Growing realization that indigenous epistemologies can be deployed in the search for solutions on important existential problems confronting modern society.
- Sankofa trend afoot by academia, development practitioners and policymakers
- Resurgent interest in what traditional knowledge can contribute to modern scientific problems



# CULTURAL INNOVATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

- Studies by Harmsworth on Maori traditional knowledge systems on environmental protection
- Integrated into Western paradigms for sustainable management of natural resources.
- Using proverbs in HIV/AIDS work in East Africa
- Breaking abstract concepts for better understanding,
- Recombining elements of culture



# AFRICAN TRADITIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY

- The law alone cannot enforce the common interest.
- It principally needs community knowledge and support, which entails greater public participation in the decisions that affect the environment.
- -Bruntland





## AFRICAN

- Continent rich in traditions  
codifying sustainability measures:
- Taboos on fishing and hunting;
- Indigenous soil fertility practise
- Sacred groves
- Moosu tree taboo in Botswana



# POTENCY OF INDIGENOUS LAWS

Taboos, Myths,  
Folklore govern  
people's behaviour  
towards the earth,  
plants and wildlife



# ENVIRONMENTAL PEDAGOGY



Children socialized to understand and respect relationship with the environment



## ENVIRONMENTAL PEDAGOGY

- Several cultural tools:
- Symbols and Symbolic actions,
- Festivals,
- Cleansing Rituals
- Songs, Oral Poetry, Riddles,



- Folktales, Fables, Myths,
- Traveller's tales,
- Religious legends, Prayers, Blessings
- Totem system
- Naming Traditions
- Proverbs



## USES OF ENCHANTMENT

- Studies on the use of folklore in propaganda, pedagogy, etc.
- Nazi anti-Semitic campaigns
- Ananse trickster tales
- African Proverbs Project  
Calendars



## PROVERBS AS POWERFUL TEXT

- “There is often more spiritual force in a proverb than in whole philosophical systems“ – Thomas Carlyle
- Proverbs express the culture of a people
- Shed light on their worldview
- Evoke a sense of traditional wisdom passed on from generation to generation.
- Allow for Creativity (can be reshaped and re-interpreted to suit purpose of discourse)



## FUNCTION OF PROVERBS

- “Help us in our everyday life and communication to cope with the complexities of the modern human condition” – Wolfgang Mieder
- Lead us to conceive and understand the essence of human relationships, events, life's situations and the behavior patterns of people - Dzobo
- Guide to conduct
- Express values
- Express abstract truths







KNOWLEDGE IS LIKE A BAOBAB TREE

“Knowledge grows and grows and so there is no end to what any one individual can know;”

“He who knows all, knows nothing.”



## ENDLESS SOURCE OF ECOLOGICAL WISDOM

- Objects of nature, plants and animals suitable symbols and metaphors because they run true to type.
- Tropes from the ecosystem – elephant, hare, crocodile, ants, fowl, cows, antelopes, birds, fish varieties; palm tree, maize, guinea corn, banana, cola nut tree etc.



- Proverbs multi-layered and invite different interpretations
- Framing in imagery drawn from environment promotes awareness of the interconnectedness between the human and biotic worlds
- Provide language through which arguments on environmental sustainability can be simplified



## EXAMPLE

- The United Nations and NGOs campaigns on safeguarding the environment have adopted the use of the Kikuyu (Kenya) proverb:
- “Treat our earth well for it was not given to us by our parents; it is lent to us by our children.”



## INTERCONNECTEDNESS BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND BIOTIC WORLDS

- “When death befalls the shrubs, grass and plants, life comes to a standstill,”
- That which scratches the wild animal, also scratches the human being;”
- “He who buries the tree will next bury the wild animal and after that bury his own ox, and ultimately bury his own children.”





PROMOTING HARMONY

The water bird says, if it were not for the help of the river, it would lose its eating place.



# THE DIVINITY OF EARTH

- *Tumi nyinaa ne asase*, meaning all power emanates from the earth



## SACREDNESS OF NATURE

- God created the forest/groves to provide/ protect the secrets of the earth.
- If you plant a tree on this earth, you are preparing for
- A thick forest is the house of God
- The earth creature that owns the world, its grandchild am I







THE BOUNTY OF NATURE

Nature provided man with two cheeks to help him eat hot food



## LESSONS IN NATURE STUDY

- One tree cannot make a forest
- If you are thirsty in the desert, follow the birds
- Every water source has got its natural runway
- All kinds of mushrooms which grow on the same palm tree are edible
- A good plant cannot grow out of a bad seed
- A plant, however healthy, cannot fare well in contaminated soil;
- A palm never surpasses the silk cotton tree in height
- A tree cannot stand without its roots
- A crab does not beget a bird.



## SUSTAINABILITY, PRESERVATION AND CAREFUL HUSBANDRY

- Treat our earth well for it was not given to us by our parents, It is lent to us by our children
- One generation plants a tree and the other enjoys the shade
- It is because of the future that when we come across a banana tree we prune it,
- The earth is not a mat you can fold
- Take and throw away, take and throw away made the stool sell its servant.”



## MODERNITY DISCOVERS PROVERBS

- Transformations in media landscape
- Rejuvenation of proverbs by TV and Radio presenters
- Local language stations and Community radio stations especially reviving the art of proverb speaking as a way of asserting their language competence and command over subject matter



# PROVERBS MAKE GREAT SOUND BITES



- Fit in very nicely with how the media process information because they reduce complex ideas and messages into simple, easy-to-repeat, memorable phrases.
- Kofi Asare Opoku likens them to Madison Avenue advertising campaigns that are able to convey messages “through vivid pictures, or humour.”



# WHAT COMMUNITY RADIO CAN DO



- **A communications gap has kept environmental, population, and development assistance groups apart for too long, preventing us from being aware of our common interest and realizing our combined power - Bruntland**



## ADVANTAGES OF COMMUNITY RADIO

- Values of Community Radio and modes of engaging with indigenous communities in which they broadcast makes them particularly attractive vehicles for cultural innovation
- Three organizations in one – broadcast entity; non-profit organization and community institution
- Honed communicative and advocacy skills





- Collaborate with other NGOs
- Programs broadcast in local language and using Friarian participatory research approaches
- Committed to supporting the self-development of their communities, and affirming and strengthening their culture
- Undertake programme production with full participation of the community
- They respect “the particular view of the world held by the people” (Friere)
- They have legitimacy and credibility



# COMMUNITY RADIO INITIATIVES IN SUSTAINABILITY

- A number of initiatives by community radio on natural resource management
- Have provided opportunity for discovering proverbs on environmental sustainability
- Community radio stations collecting proverbs and other folklore from within communities, using them as powerful advocacy tools



## USING PROVERBS TO EMPOWER AND ENGAGE LOCAL PEOPLE

- To enrich discourses and encourage participatory dialogue
- To allow often disempowered stakeholders a chance to establish their knowledge
- To draw out discussion on sensitive issues in non-threatening ways



- To generate awareness
- To help individuals change attitudes and behaviour patterns
- To introduce new ideas and practices.



## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- Reconnecting local people with wisdom of forefathers demonstrated by community radio initiatives
- Need to mitigate Euphoria
- The challenge however is the “cosmopolitans” or urbanites
- In proverb speak they are the “take and throw away, take and throw away” generation that risk making “the stool sell its servant.”
- They are less likely to buy into traditional wisdom



- Low or no skills in proverb speaking , understanding or making
- Fireside story telling replaced by western fairy tales read to them in bed
- For them other kinds of enchantment is needed to inculcate the values of sustainability
- Perhaps the enchantment of Disney or some other Western folklore resulting from the globalisation of culture.



# GLOCALIZATION?

**Tinker Bell UN Honorary  
Ambassador of Green**



**Adaptation**

