

## Book Review

### **Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Sustainable Development: Relevance for Africa**

Edited by E. K. Boon and L. Hens. vi, 262 pp., figures, illustrations, photographs, index. Kamla-Raj Enterprises, Delhi, India. Published (2007). Hard cover, US\$ 75/-

The book is divided into four parts, comprising a collection of 23 articles (by 27 authors), representing conference contributions, and ranging from theoretical overviews to empirical case studies. In general, the contributions are of a high quality. The technical presentation is good; and the contents are easy to read and informative in nature. Although no mention is made of the contributions having been evaluated by peers for the purposes of publication, the “discussion model” that was followed during the conference probably ensured quality and facilitated the presentation of insightful perspectives. The last chapter, “Summary and Conclusion”, warrants special mention, since it formulates the core aspects of the contributions with particular insight. However, since the conference focused on the relevance of IKS for sustainable development, one would have expected the discussions of the identified key strategies to be taken a step further. Recommendations regarding the operationalisation of these key strategies would have been of inestimable practical value.

The title of the book creates the impression that the focus falls on Africa. However, an entire section is devoted to international case studies. The motivation for this is not convincing, since neither the relevance of these case studies for Africa, nor their application in the African context,

is appropriately illustrated. It would also appear that only two of the contributors are currently from Africa. This creates the unfortunate impression that Africa is (once again) being discussed *for* Africa and not *with* Africa!

The dichotomous manner in which Western Knowledge Systems are separated and distinguished from Indigenous Knowledge Systems amounts, firstly, to a denial of the fact that indigenous knowledge comprises an intrinsic part of the knowledge base of disciplines, even though it may not necessarily be arranged in terms of the traditional academic conventions of distinct disciplines. Secondly, it is based on the incorrect assumption that all international knowledge systems generated through universities, government research centres and private industry are Western Knowledge Systems.

All knowledge contents are holistically interconnected, in the sense that no absolute distinction can be made between the spiritual, social and physical realities – and this is all the more true in the case of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Although it would undoubtedly not have been possible for each of the respective contributions to take this assumption into account, one would have expected it to be mentioned – at least on a metaphysical level.

However, the positive aspects of the publication far outweigh the critical points that have been highlighted above; and students who are serious about studying the themes relating to IKS and sustainable development will derive benefit from this publication.

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