

# ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN THE PRESERVATION OF POTTERY AND BLACK SOAP-MAKING: A CASE STUDY OF IPETUMODU, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*Indigenous knowledge such as, black soap making and the art of pottery are fast going into extinction due to the influx of modern technology. Continued negligence of documenting and preserving these arts could lead to the gradual extinction of these IK systems. The study documented the role of libraries in the preservation of pottery and black soap-making that are peculiar to Ipetumodu, Osun State, Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative method involving, interviews and observation. Total enumeration was employed to obtain the study respondents. Study findings revealed that the arts of pottery and soap-making in Ipetumodu are dominated by women. All the respondents are elderly and young people who show no interest in the local arts and crafts due to the slow and gruesome processes involved. Consequently, no apprentices were found in the two locations visited. The study suggested that libraries should ensure that all aspects of the indigenous knowledge on soap-making and pottery are adequately captured, documented and made available in public libraries for use. Libraries should collaborate with the government and the custodians of indigenous knowledge to establish the cultural value of the arts.*

**Keywords:** Black soap-making, pottery, Indigenous knowledge systems, Libraries, Southwestern, Nigeria

## Introduction

Indigenous knowledge (IK) refers to the unique traditional, local knowledge systems which are peculiar to a particular geographical area. Hunter (2013) asserted that indigenous knowledge is all-encompassing and includes cultural heritage in the form of handicrafts, artwork, traditional stories, plants, animals and folk among others. Learning from and building on the IK content in local communities helps to empower communities and foster a sense of productivity and creativity amongst the indigenous people. The influx of industrial and domestic containers such as metal drums aluminium pots and pans, plastic buckets, basins, porcelain and enamelware, constitute a serious threat to the traditional pottery industry (Faluyi, 2018). Yoruba pottery is made manually without the aid of any sophisticated equipment. To date, potters in Ipetumodu throw pots manually without using a potter's wheel.

The key challenge posed on the survival of the art of pottery is the imminence of the potters' old age (Fatuyi, 2019). Sadly, the traditional pottery industry is on the decline in Ipetumodu. The art of pottery in most parts of the world, developed from traditional pottery culture, moreover fewer

apprentices are engaged in pottery in recent times, which implies that the art of pottery could go into extinction (Umoru-Oke, 2017 and Fatuyi, 2019). The process should therefore be properly documented for the sake of posterity.

Another indigenous knowledge system in Ipetumodu which is on the verge of extinction is the traditional black soap produced without any additives. Black soap (Ose Dudu) is valued for its numerous benefits. It evens skin tone, minimises scars and blemishes and has anti-fungal properties and cures skin rashes among other benefits. Adebayo, Kayode, Ojo et al. (2019) have reported that black soap-making contributed immensely to the economy of communities and the livelihood of the women engaged in it. IK is important to the economic sustainability of any community because, it is an inexpensive yet invaluable tool for modern industries. Anyira, Onoriode, Nwabueze (2010) had concluded that many libraries recognise IK as an important source of developmental information. Though, the majority of indigenous people in the developing countries do not accord IK systems the necessary importance and disregard their own IK in support of Western science. It is against this background that this study focuses on the preservation of the dying art of pottery and black soap making in Ipetumodu in Osun State, Southwestern Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are to:

- 1 identify the arts and crafts that are peculiar to Ipetumodu in Ife-North, Osun State, Nigeria
- 2 document the black soap making process in Ipetumodu, Ife-North, Osun State, Nigeria
- 3 document the pottery making process in Ipetumodu, Ife-North, Osun State, Nigeria
4. identify the challenges facing potters and black soap-makers in Ipetumodu.

### **Methodology**

#### **Study Site**

The study was carried out in Ipetumodu, Ife-North Local Government in Osun State, Nigeria. Ipetumodu is a major town in Ife-North with coordinates (Longitude 07°52.182' N; latitude 004°43.106'E) with Latitude, 48.85341 and longitude, 2.3488 (Adedeji, Adesakin, Oni et al, 2019). It is the headquarters of Ife North Local Government of Osun State Nigeria. Ipetumodu is about 218 kilometres from Lagos, the commercial capital of Nigeria. It shares a boundary with Ile-Ife, the spiritual headquarters of the Yoruba People, Yakooyo and Asipa and has a population of 211, 100 (Adedeji, Adesakin, Oni et al, 2019). It is an agrarian community although some indigenes trade in other products/items apart from farm produce. Southwestern Nigeria is one of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria consisting of six states: Osun, Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, and Oyo. All the states are

inhabited by Yoruba speaking people and value their culture a lot. The two study sites: the soap making site and the pottery site are situated in Ipetumodu.

### Sample and Sampling Technique

The total enumeration technique was adopted for the study considering the very small number of potters and black soap makers in Ipetumodu. The study population comprised all the six soap makers and one potter in the study area. The study adopted qualitative methods involving interviews and observation. The researchers went to the study sites with a digital camera to capture the soap making and pottery processes. The respondents identified the custodians of indigenous knowledge (IK) in the areas of soap making and pottery who were interviewed. The interview schedule elicited information on the processes involved in soap making and pottery. The processes of soap making and pottery were captured on a digital camera. Consent was duly obtained for video recording, oral interview and photographs. The researchers diligently observed the production processes at the two study sites. Data was collected in Yoruba and transcribed as the custodians of the IK were literate in Yoruba not literate in English. All data obtained were content analysed based on the themes emerging from the study the objectives.

### Data Collection and Analysis

#### Results

**Table 1: Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents**

Socio-demographic profile	Frequency (n)	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
60-70	1	16.7%
71 and above	5	83.3%
Total	6	100%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	0	0%
Female	6	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Occupation</b>		
Pottery	1	16.7%
Soap making	5	83.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 shows that 1(16.7%) of the respondents was aged 60-70 years while 5(83.3%) were aged 71 years and above. All 6 (100%) of the respondents were female. Only 1(16.3%) was engaged in pottery while 5(83.3%) were soap makers.

At the black soap-making site, the respondents were asked to itemise the indigenous arts and crafts in Ipetumodu community. Madam Amope a black soap-maker stated, " In the past there were various arts and crafts in Ipetumodu and the entire Origbo Mejeeje, which included: wood carving, pottery, black soap making, blacksmithing, drum carving, local dye, local sweet production, goldsmithing, "agadagidi and Otika" [Agadagidi' is a local wine made from plantain while 'Otika' is made from guinea corn]. Presently the only arts and crafts which are still being practised include: drum carving, blacksmithing, black soap-making and pottery, while the others have become extinct.

### **Respondents' Comments on Black-Soap Making**

At the soap-making site the researchers were informed that the art of black soap-making is on the verge of extinction. The researchers probed further and asked the respondents to explain the remark that soap-making is on the verge of extinction. Madam Abidoye lamented that:

*"only a few women are presently involved in the production of black soap unlike in the past. In the past, they were more than thirty (30) women that used to be at the soap making site carrying out the production and sale of black soap as a profitable business but now they are just five (5) on the site doing the work"* (Respondent 1).

The five women still remaining at soap-making site are all aged. Their ages ranged from seventy (70) years to eighty (80) years.

### **Raw Materials Required for Making Black Soap**

Madam Amope and Iya Ibeji itemised the materials for black soap as follows: palm kernel oil, wood ash, water, iron cooking pots; clay, filter pots; wooden stirring paddles, etc. "*Elewo*" (the filtrate from ashes solution after potash has been removed). This is the starting point for the preparation of the potash (*omi aro*) (Respondents 2 & 3).

### **Step by Step Process of Black Soap-Making in Ipetumodu**

#### **Step 1**

- Add the "*elewo*" to ashes in a filter pot to collect potash (*omi aro*).
- Heat the potash till white flakes (*eyin aro*) are formed and float on the top of the mixture which is evidence that the alkaline soda solution is ready for use.
- Allow the alkaline soda solution to cool to room temperature.
- Set the cooled soda solution aside until it is required.

#### **Step 2**

- Roast palm kernels to obtain the palm kernel oil (PKO) (Adi);

- Grind the roasted palm kernels. Heat the grounded palm kernel with enough water and stir with a wooden spoon until a homogenous mixture is formed and PKO is extracted from the mixture.

### Step 3

Add PKO (*Adi*) to the alkaline soda solution in a ratio/ proportion of 1:3 and cook in an iron pot while stirring continuously in a clockwise direction over low heat. The mixture is brought to a boil slowly while stirring continuously with the wooden paddle till a thick black paste is formed. The saponification of the PKO and alkaline solution forms the black soap which is the thick black paste. The soap is allowed to cool and then turned into moulds. When the soap sets in the mould, it is cut into various sizes and sold.

However, the soap makers hereby warn that one should not just follow the steps to produce the black soap without closely watching the practical process from the beginning to the end. The respondents recounted an ugly incident of a school-girl who went for a competition on how to produce black soap and sustained injury due to inadequate experience. It is, therefore, imperative for anyone to have adequate knowledge of the process before going into production. It is suggested that video recording could be the best option to preserve the art of soap-making.

### Black Soap-Making Process



**Plate I:** One of the researchers interviewing one of the respondents.



**Plate II:** Alkaline water (Omi aro)



**Plate III:** Stirring the mixture of PKO '*adi*' and alkaline solution on and on.



**Plate IV:** Cooled black soap poured into a mould

### **Preservation of the Arts of Black Soap-making**

The respondents were asked to suggest a way to preserve the art of black soap-making. Madam Abike responded: *“we do not know how to preserve this knowledge because the young people do not show interest at all in making black soap”* (Respondent 4).

### **Challenges Facing the Art of Black Soap-making**

Madam Amope categorically stated *“Before one can embark on any business he/she must serve as an apprentice for several years as stipulated by the Artisan (master crafts man). This is because it involves observation and hands-on experience hence an apprentice must be able to persevere to acquire the requisite skills. “Young people are not interested in most of the arts and crafts because they lack the stamina and patience to endure”* (Respondent 2). As the researchers were on the site, an observer from the community, Mr Akingbade corroborated the submission of Madam Amope, *“When I was young I used to help my mother to collect ashes from house to house for black soap preparation but young people of nowadays are not willing to do such tedious menial work”* (Respondents 5 & 2). Madam Abidoye another black soap-maker stated, *“The major challenge is the smoke which is dangerous to the eyes. For this reason, young people who are students and therefore need their eyes to study would not want to engage in soap making for fear of damage to the eyes. It was once suggested that gas or some other smokeless fuel could be used to process the black soap in place of firewood to avoid smoke.”* (Respondent 1).

### **Pottery Production**

Fatuyi (2018) has claimed that pottery is one of the traditional crafts widely practised in southwestern Nigeria. Pottery has been universally accepted and is as old as the origin of man. Mama Ile-Asalu is the only potter in Ipetumodu and her workshop is located at the front of her house. She noted that:

*“The art of pottery is at the height of extinction.  
People left the business due to old age, some others*

*have migrated to the cities to stay with their children, I myself will stop the production very soon and retire due to old age. Others have passed on while some left for other businesses that seem to be more lucrative” (Respondent 6).*

### **Step by Step Procedure for Pottery Making**

Materials for making clay pots include clay, wooden mortar and pestle, water, kiln “*ada*” Mode size (*ide*), plant leaves or corn stick for decoration.

#### **Step 1**

- Collect clay either by buying or digging from the site
- Remove stones and pebbles from the clay
- Pound the clay painstakingly to a very smooth paste.
- Use the mode size (*ide*) spread ash on it, thereafter, take the prepared clay, place it on the mode size of your choice and start to press it systematically until the clay covers the mode. Use a sharp object such as a knife to trim the edges then remove it to dry for some days. Add the finishing touches. After which you will fire on “*Ada*. However, this has a unique technique that needs to be learnt, which also suggests that video recording is the utmost means of preserving the IK of pottery making.

### **Preservation of the Art Pottery**

The response of Iya Ile-Asalu, the only potter in the pottery village was similar to what was obtained from the soap makers. She said, “*I don’t know because many researchers like yourself have been coming here to interview us but, I am yet to see the effect or benefits of the series of interviews” (Respondent 6).* As it was suggested by the soap-makers the potter also supported video recording of the pottery-making process for posterity.

### **Challenges Facing the Pottery Making Business**

At the pottery village Iya Ile-Asalu was asked about the challenges facing the arts of pottery. In response she observed that: “*no young one wants to do this type of work, no access to the river-banks where they use to collect good clay as a result of development in the community. I buy clay from those who dig boreholes within the community. Old age is another critical issue as you can see now, I am old and will soon leave the art” (Respondent 6).* Out of many women in the pottery village only Iya Ile Asalu remains in the business and she is in her late seventies.



**Plate V:** Iya Ile-Asalu (Respondent 6) can be seen at work moulding the pot manually.



**Plate VI:** Kiln where the pots are fired and the finished products.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study revealed that the number of the cultural arts had reduced greatly, and just very few are left. Young people do not have an interest in arts and crafts. The reason for this could be that the process of the arts and crafts are too laborious and therefore not attractive to them. The findings were similar to that of Fatuyi (2019) who found that the potters were old and their leader was in her late eighties. Adebayo et al. (2019). Respondent's ages were in the range of 61-80 years showing that they are advanced in age. The gender of the respondents was female, which was in

tandem with the reports of Faluyi (2019) and Adebayo et al (2019) who found that women are predominantly engaged in pottery and soap-making in Yoruba communities. IK systems in the area of pottery and soap-making are gradually going into extinction if libraries are not proactive to capture the IK practices for posterity.

The finding of the study revealed that five (5) women are left in the black soap-making industry compared to a large number of people that used to be on-site in the past. The saddest situation was that of pottery making where only one (1) old woman is left in the entire Ipetumodu community. The study agreed with the submission of Umoru-Oke (2017) who observed that Yoruba potters are very scanty; the few that are available are with a few or no apprentices. This observation was further corroborated by Fatuyi (2018) who lamented that the pottery practised in recent times is less than what it was in the 1960s. It was observed in this study that there was no apprentice at both sites of the study, which led to, the demand for black soap and clay pots being higher than the supply due to lack of hands to work.

Anyira, Oghenovo and Nwabueze (2010) have observed the growing appreciation of the value of IK in recent times. The findings of the study revealed that video recording was one of the most important ways in which indigenous knowledge could be preserved. If the process of arts and crafts are video recorded it can be used to arouse the interest of young people who can take the knowledge to a higher level through their creative potentials. IK has become valuable to all and sundry not necessarily those that depend on it as a means of livelihood. Consequently, libraries should recognise IK in the areas of soap-making and pottery as important sources of economic development of society. The black soap making industry cannot be undermined because of the value in the community such as the health and economic development of the society. The role traditional arts hold in socio-economic importance deserves more attention from libraries and community leaders than what obtains presently.

Nigerian libraries should borrow a leaf from other countries such as India and the Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The vision of SAARC is to create a composite digital library that will network the individual Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) from each country (Nakata, Byrne, Nakata and Gardiner (2006). Libraries must capture IK in their localities and provide a platform or system for organising, disseminating and retrieving IK globally. Consequently, adequate training should be given to library staff from time to time in order, to keep pace with technologies in use for capturing and dissemination of arts and crafts to library patrons. Dlamini (2017) asserted that information and communication technology tools appear to be providing a solution in forestalling the possible extinction of IK.

## **Conclusion**

The researchers identified the ancient arts of black soap making and pottery which are peculiar to the women of Ipetumodu in Osun State, and are

on the verge of extinction. The two processes and the challenges being faced by the women still carrying on these trades were documented.

Sadly, the study revealed that only six elderly women are still engaging in the two crafts in the whole Ipetumodu community. Study respondents expressed concern that once their generation dies off, the two indigenous knowledge systems will become extinct. The reason is because young people are not willing to learn these crafts due to the laborious processes involved hence the likelihood of this indigenous knowledge being lost to posterity through extinction.

Considering the gravity of the study findings, the researchers decided to intervene by documenting the two processes through graphics, oral interview and video as a means of conservation and preservation of this indigenous knowledge system which was once a very viable source of livelihood for the women in Ipetumodu community.

Based on the findings of the study, it could deduce that only a few aged women are carrying on the arts of soap-making and pottery in Ipetumodu, Ife-North in Osun State. Lack of apprentices is an indication that the indigenous knowledge in the arts of black soap-making and pottery in the study area is on the verge of extinction. Thus, it is imperative for libraries to be pro-active in preservation of the aged-long cultural heritage for the benefit of the economic and social development of the Ipetumodu community.

### **Recommendations**

The study therefore recommends that:

1. Librarians should acquire adequate ICT competencies in order to facilitate the use of the library website for the effective dissemination of indigenous knowledge of local communities to a global audience.
2. Libraries should determine the optimum and most culturally appropriate approach to selecting, eliciting and recording, describing and disseminating this knowledge without insensitivity, constraints, degradation or misrepresentation of the materials, for easy accessibility. Library patrons could directly access the materials and build upon them, to contribute to the economic, social and psychological development of local communities.
3. Libraries should liaise with the government and custodians of indigenous knowledge to understand and establish their cultural values. Libraries should also be involved in organising seminars, workshops, talks and tours and information sessions to create awareness for the Indigenous knowledge products available in the communities.
4. Academic and public libraries should also be involved in outreach work to increase contact with indigenous people in their localities by going to them for a clear understanding of the processes involved in the production of the art of pottery and black soap-making for posterity.

5. Libraries should repackage and rebrand IK systems in an appealing manner to attract young people for maximum production and to also serve as tourist attractions which could lead to increased economic benefits to the communities.
6. The government at all levels should partner with communities for the establishment of viable indigenous knowledge systems and give libraries financial support to ensure that all available indigenous knowledge systems are identified, captured, preserved and made available for all potential users.

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