

Continuity & change

the dynamism of 'traditional' knowledge

Local and indigenous knowledge is frequently represented as a fixed body of ancient wisdom that is passed down intact from generation to generation. Terms such as 'tradition' and 'heritage' evoke constancy, immutability and inflexibility. In reality, local knowledge has always been reassessed, renewed and expanded. Each generation reinterprets the knowledge of their forebears to confront the emerging challenges and opportunities of a changing world.

The adoption of modern technologies by indigenous peoples is often misinterpreted as the abandonment of their distinct values and ways of life. In reality, the capacity to incorporate new tools and skills has always been fundamental to the dynamism of indigenous cultures. Indeed, it is by blending new ways with old that many indigenous communities are able to uphold their unique lifestyles and worldviews.

Inuit in Arctic Canada are quick to adopt modern technologies to strengthen their hunting, fishing and trapping way of life. Motorised transport allowed them to regain access to distant hunting territories, abandoned when Inuit settled into permanent villages in the 1960s.



Francis R. Hickey

A fisherman throwing a nylon cast net in the sandy shallows in Vanuatu. Resource depletion is often falsely attributed to technological change. Entry into a market economy may be the more decisive factor, inciting individuals to forsake community values for individual profit.



Douglas Nakashima

A group of men from the Marovo Lagoon, Solomon Islands, prepare to return home after a day's fishing on the barrier reef. The canoe is a large dugout carved from a huge *golothi* tree, and is powered by a community-owned outboard motor. Such motors, supporting subsistence fishing activities, are now ubiquitous in the Western Solomons.



Edward Hvinging



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Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems
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