

Culture and Cultural Diversity in Sustainable Development: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

The study investigates the importance of culture and cultural diversity in sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper examines the concepts of culture, cultural diversity and sustainable development and affirms that culture can be used as a stabilizing agent and an effective tool for arresting the tide of poverty, unemployment and misery. Culture also enhances progressive human development, creativity and increase productivity, the paper reveals that if Nigeria wants to move away from its present chaotic and violent condition, building culture into development process is the only remedy. This is because culture is the values, attitudes and behaviours that reflects and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice, respect for human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence and endeavour to prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation. The paper affirms that culture creates employment, preserves the resources and strengthens the resilience of communities in the face of disasters, culture is truly major and irreplaceable. This paper also reveals that development interventions that are responsive to the culture context and the particularities of a place and community, and advance a human-centered approach to development, are most effective and likely to yield sustainable, inclusive and equitable outcomes. The paper suggests the involvement of the communities in policy-making to safeguard their cultural heritage, promotion of inter-culture dialogue to harness social cohesion, integrating culture in the conception, measurement and practice of development. Culture should be put at the centre of the sustainable development paradigm to allow for greater diversity in policy choice. Culture is the central pillar of sustainable development, therefore, cultural diversity in Nigeria should be seen as an asset rather than a burden.

Key words: Culture, cultural diversity and sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Do what will make you comfortable and not what people like.

The area of culture has grown in salience in global development issues on account of the rising share of cultural goods, services and intellectual property in world trade as well as the threats to cultural diversities and identities associated with contemporary globalization. Also, there is increasing awareness that the protection and promotion of cultural diversity is vital to universal human rights, fundamental freedoms along with securing ecological and genetic diversity Bell (2003). This standpoint is premised on the view that sustainable development is only achievable if there is harmony and alignment between the objectives of cultural diversity and that of social equity, environmental responsibility, and economic viability.

As Adefuye (2011), pointed out, we need to dig deep into our past and our culture to keep the government on its feet and ensure the creation of a climate by which true democracy will be the basis of governance, this needs to be solidified because it is only when our leaders realize that the conditions for retaining their positions is effective performance, that we can expect commitment to the will of the people.

While relating Nigeria's historical antecedents to that of its neighbours in Africa, Adefuye, observed that Nigeria had always remained a united entity and that its political and numerical strength had equally influenced its foreign policies. He explained, Nigeria should use the inherent factors of history and culture, its cultural relationship with many countries in Africa and the diaspora as leverage in the pursuit of its foreign policy objectives.

He listed a number of ways in which the country had helped its neighbours but blamed leaders for failing to maximize the potential for the purposes of economic and political growth. Nigeria is one of the most naturally endowed countries in the world. We have oil, gas, cocoa, groundnut, palm oil, tin and almost any mineral one can think of. Our people are not only gifted but also hard working. There is no profession on earth in which Nigerian has not excelled. Our problem has been that of dedicated and informed leadership, neglect of our cultural heritage.

Tunde Babawae, Director of Centre for Black and African Arts and Culture (CBAAC), affirms the importance of culture in the continued search for social, economic and political development. According to him, our culture must be made to influence our relationship with ourselves and others. Therefore, from the above, a

nation's culture largely determines its behaviour in the international system. Our culture of honesty, hard work and tolerance must be brought to bear on our relationship to the outside world as much as they influence our domestic policy.

Nigeria lacks available culture compass, and an ideology rooted in culture. Therefore, it is imperative that we recreate a worthy polity based on the culture and traditions of our people specifically tailored to our peculiarities, rational interaction with the dynamics of globalization.

Culture can be used as a stabilizing agent and an effective tool for arresting the tide of poverty, unemployment and misery, it can also be used to entrench progressive human development, enhance creativity and increase productivity for the common good, which in essence is what sustainable development is all about.

If Ohamae's contention is true, that, nothing matters more than what people know, or want or value, then, we need to pose the following questions, how much knowledge do Nigerians have about Nigerian history? To what extent can we say bodies saddled with the responsibilities for propagating Nigerian culture are comparable with their counterparts in other countries in terms of governmental funding and support? This paper seeks to examine or elaborate on the role of culture and cultural diversity in sustainable development along with the social; economic and environmental dimensions.

Conceptual Clarification

Here, it is important to define concepts that are relevant to the study for proper understanding. Of great importance here are culture, cultural diversity and sustainable development.

Culture

There are as many interpretation of this phenomenon as there are scholars and students. Culture is real and important. This explains why Alan and Joseph (1975:25-41) observed that it would result in a catastrophe if by any means the prevailing culture of mankind is wiped out, yet leaving the human species biologically intact. Udu (2002:41) exposition on culture is broader, He suggests that for human beings to build houses, cultivate farms, construct bridges, dams or electricity generating plants, provide qualitative formal education, manage successful businesses, control population growth, prevent or cure sicknesses and diseases, ensure social trust, good governance, law and order, they need an established albert critically receptive body of ideas and beliefs, designs, techniques and methodologies, rules and regulations which is culture. But for culture, with globalization, information and communication technology, men would have lost all knowledge of even the basic means of survival such that within a short time the entire species would disappear forever.

Having stressed the need for culture, Ayandele (2005) sees culture as what man interposes between himself and his environment in order to ensure his security and survival. Ukeje (1992:395) sees culture as the totality of a people's way of life as deduced from material and non- material aspects of their life such as clothing, values, beliefs, thoughts, feelings and customs. By this definition, culture includes traits imbibed by all healthy individuals in the course of growing in a specific society.

Agbaje (1996:41-51) also presents a more embracing definition as he states that culture embraces all the material and non material expressions of a people as well as the processes in which the expressions are communicated. By this definition, culture has to do with the social, ethical, intellectual, scientific, artistic and technological expressions and processes of a people usually ethical and or nationally or supra-nationally related and usually living in a geographically continuous area, what they pass on to their successors and how these are passed on.

Oyeneye and Shoremi (1985:3) gave certain features of culture as being shared by members of society, it is not genetically transmitted, it is historically derived and transmitted from generation to another, it is created through the process of adjustment to the social setting, it is universally found in every human society and it is also dynamic. The definition of culture by Agbaje is supported by this paper as it is the most clear definition of culture given in this paper.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Since 1970, destruction of the Ozone layer, global warming, global environment destruction such as declining biodiversity, and pollution has gained international attention. This environmental destruction and pollution cannot be blamed on any specific country, and no country can escape the effects of this destruction and pollution, meaning it carries interest for every nation. These problems will inevitably have an impact on future generations. This is an issue that involves the existence of the people of every country and goes beyond space time. In order to adequately deal with these global environmental issues, the current rules that were made to focus on the perpetrator-victim relationship are inappropriate, and new rules that are more comprehensive and future- oriented must be developed. Sustainable development has been a large contributor to these new rules.

World commission on Environment and Development report (1987) says, our common future, sees sustainable development as a comprehensive concept meaning development to fulfill the needs of the present generation without harming the capacity to fulfill the needs of future generation.

Specifically, sustainable development suggests an enduring, remarkable, non-terminal improvement in the quality of life, standard of living and life chances of the people. Such development must be capable of surviving generations over a prolonged period of time. It favours a progressive curve in human development encompassing enhanced creativity for increased productivity. It is also defined as a deliberate and systematic policy of ensuring the survival of a state in such conditions that are imperative for the enjoyment of the good life and ensuring the greatest good for the greatest numbers are available now without this constituting a denial of the capacity of being able to enjoy the same benefits to generations yet unborn in the foreseen future. This is achievable through the judicious and careful use of global resources.

Development must involve two basic processes. The first has to do with improving and refining that which is already in existence and adapting it to contemporary requirements. The second process involves finding solutions to new problems or new forms of solutions to old problems. Both imply creative responses to social, political and economic affairs.

If sustainable development was going to be a totally comprehensive idea; then it was natural that it would also be included in the cultural aspect. People live in some kind of social group, and those groups possess their own intrinsic spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional characteristics, in other words, culture; sustainable development of human society can not be discussed without taking into consideration the cultural aspects that always come with human lifestyle.

Cultural diversity and sustainable development

An important part of the cultural side of sustainable development is cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is necessary for sustainable development for two reasons: the first is human survival as a means of cultural existence. The coexistence of various cultures leads to humans being able to better adapt to the environment. It is because of the coexistence of diverse cultures that the human race has overcome environmental change and continued to survive. The emergence of differing culture and maintenance of cultural diversity has raised the possibility of the human race to adapt to environmental change in the future. Furthermore, in order for culture itself to retain its creativity and vitality, the existence of other cultures is a must. New ideas are born from other cultures, and the source of cultural creativity lies within constant encounters between different cultures.

The second reason is guarantee of security and the safeguarding of human rights for minorities. Lack of mutual understanding between countries causes war, conflicts and terrorism. To build peace that leads to development, it is necessary to have mutual understanding and tolerance between cultures. If people accept cultural diversity and understand cultures other than their own, it will contribute to the prevention of conflict, building of peace and development. Hence, cultural diversity in Nigeria nation should be seen as an asset rather than a burden.

CULTURE IN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

If Nigeria wants to move away from its present chaotic and violent condition, building culture into development process is the remedy. This is because culture is the values, attitudes and behaviours, interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, respect for all human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence and endeavour to prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation that guarantee the full exercise of all rights and the means to participate fully in the development process of their society (UN, 1999).

According to (UN, 1999) culture in development means actions that foster a culture through education, to the promotion of sustainable economic and social development, promotion of respect for all human rights to ensuring equality between women and men, democratic participation, understanding, tolerance and solidarity, support of participatory communication and the free-flow of information and knowledge to promote international peace and security. The foregoing shows that no meaningful development can be achieved without involving culture.

The development interventions that are responsible to the cultural context and the particularities of a place and community, and advance a human- centered approach to development are most effective, and likely to yield sustainable, inclusive and equitable outcomes.

The Contribution of culture to sustainable development

Deep in our hearts, we all understand that the quality of our lives depends, to a great extent, on our being able to take part in, and benefit from our culture. We know, with no need for explanation, that maintaining a connection with the unique character of our historic and natural environment, with the language, the music, the arts and the literature, which accompanied us throughout our life, is fundamental for our spiritual wellbeing and for

providing a sense of who we are. There is an intrinsic value of culture to a society, irrespective of its place in the human development index, which is apparent to everyone and which makes it a development outcome in itself.

As Udo noted; it is practically impossible to pursue development in any sphere of human experience without thinking and acting culture. This is partly responsible for the disconnection between culture and development in our national life.

Cultures creates green jobs, it reduces poverty. It makes cities more sustainable, it provides safe access to water and food. It preserves the resources of oceans and forest, it strengthens the resilience of communities in the face of disasters, is truly major and irreplaceable.

If culture is placed at the heart of our strategies, it is a condition for sustainable development, and a powerful driving factor for its achievement. Emphasizing culture means giving members of the community an actual role in directing their own destinies, restoring the agency for change to those whom the development efforts are intended to impact, which is crucial to sustainable and long-term progress.

Respecting and promoting cultural diversity facilitates intercultural dialogue, prevents conflicts and protects the rights of marginalized groups within and between nations, thus creating optimal conditions for achieving development goals.

Promoting cultural activities and traditional knowledge and skills are very effective means to strengthen environmental sustainability and the social capital of communities. Culture contributes to the alleviation of poverty, control of diseases and improvement of the standards of living of the people. Cultural heritage, culture and creative industries, sustainable cultural tourism, and cultural infrastructure serve as strategic tools for revenue generation, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, giving her rich-cultural heritage and substantial labour force.

United Nations General Assembly Outcomes Document (2010) Millennium Summit, states, cultural and creative industries represent one of the most rapidly expanding sectors in the global economy, and promoting it requires limited capital investment, involves low entry barriers and have a direct impact on vulnerable population, including women.

Today, many cities use cultural heritage and cultural events and institutions to improve their image, stimulate urban development and attract visitors as well as investment to their economies.

Culture and cultural diversity: Lessons from other 'ands

Development in East Asia remains one of the global most significant post war developments. After Japan, from the 1990's and beyond, China and the "little Tigers" of Singapore, Taiwan, and most recently the south east Asia economies including Indonesia and Malaysia have filled the top ranks of the world's economies in terms of not only their overall growth rates, but also of their human capital development, industrial and export growth rates. Literature on Chinese success story reveals that, the rudiments of a strong industrial base were built on culture and traditional practices that are still being exploited even now that the country had opened up to capitalist influences. Some observers are of the view that China's current economic success story would not have happened so soon but for this meaningful synergy between traditional values and modernity. Today, regardless of her population, size and diversity, appreciable percentage of Chinese population is still largely agrarian living on basic Chinese culture and even pursuing aggressive export of part thereof. From drugs to wears, food stuffs and consumables, every Chinese is a proud culture ambassador for China.

Chinese sense of modernization is indeed exemplary. Proud as they are of their culture, style taste and values, they have been making substantial gains from their creativity, exploring their environment and producing and packaging just anything, from bamboo through plants, herbs, fish and fish products. Making success of diversity, Malaysia was reported to have among it population ten times more ethnic Indians than Singapore does; it has thrice the number of ethnic Chinese than Singapore has. It has comparable links with Indonesia because communication between the two countries is relatively easy in the Malay language. Malaysia has recorded balanced success despite being a multiracial society. It has garnered substantial good will from her culture potential so much so that, her hospitable industry smells and tastes Malay traditional values. Singapore is yet another good success story. Small as it is, has a diverse population of 2.5 million people comprising, 70 percent Chinese, 20 percent Malay, and 10 percent Indian and virtually no resources but responds meaningfully to the dynamics of globalization, information and telecommunication technology. With political economy deeply rooted in Singaporean tradition, productivity of her nationals reflects greatly in her annual earnings as distinct from and far beyond what is prevalence in countries like Nigeria.

Biodun (1999), notes that, even in politically stable nations like the United States of America (USA), intergroup frictions exist. But even the most resistant groups in the USA have become Americanized conforming to national identify the characters of which are clearly understood by the constituent clients. The US, has rightly been referred to as the melting pot for diverse groups of immigrant communities from numerous different and assorted cultures. This synthesis in the US is a testimony to the fact that it would, take the diffusion of diverse

political, ideological and scientific movements to change things, hence cultural diversity in the Nigerian nation should be seen as an asset rather than a burden.

While we fold our arms and watch every national take advantage of our economy for relative marginal returns and at no value to our cultural possession, Chinese language among other values is fast becoming an international language as it is now being incorporated into university curricular especially in the U.S. The same goes for French in France and Malay for Malaysia and probably India and Indonesia. The truth is that all of these countries place an enviable premium on their culture.

Conclusion

The area of culture has grown in salience in global development issues on account of the rising share of cultural goods and services and intellectual property in world trade as well as the threats to cultural diversities and identities associated with contemporary globalization. There is the awareness that the protection and promotion of cultural diversity is vital to sustainable development. This paper concludes that sustainable development is only achievable between the objectives of cultural diversity and that of social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability.

It is accepted in this paper that culture is more than just the manifestations of culture, for example, the arts, and should be viewed instead as the whole social order.

The paper examines both the culture of sustainable development in terms of how it has evolved as a global agenda and how the cultural arena can be facilitated by the construct of sustainable development. Where culture is not incorporated in the development process, problems including loss of meaning in people's lives, increase in alienation and anxiety, creeping disenfranchisement, an unprecedented rationalization of violence, and destruction of the environment will occur. Therefore, culture must be placed as the central pillar and fully integrated into that of the other pillars of the economy.

The paper starts from the premise that the value of cultural diversity is equivalent to that of genetic diversity in the sustainable development debate. It identifies both the protection of cultural identities and the promotion of cultural industries as valid transition goals towards sustainable development because of the ways in which cultural content shapes and communicates the identity, values and hopes of a society. In this sense, cultural goods and services are not mere commodities, services or bundles of intellectual property. They are critical catalysts for identity formation, and nation building. The cultural industries are worthy of investment because of the returns that it generates in terms of new and indigenous forms of employment, production and exports. It also aids in the diversification of mono-cultural economies and facilitates a more competitive development platform.

RECOMMENDATION

If the following proposed measures are adhered to, Nigeria will remain the giant of Africa and also on the global success story of development. Culture should be integrated into governance.

Culture should also be integrated in the conception, measurement, and practice of development with a view to advancing inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development.

Sustainable cultural tourism, cultural and creative industries, cultural institutions and culture-based urban revitalization sector should be supported to generate decent employment, stimulate local development, and foster entrepreneurship.

- Our traditional knowledge should be capitalized on to foster environmental sustainability.
- Intercultural dialogue must be promoted to harness social cohesion thereby, creating an environment conducive to development.
- The communities should be involved in policy-making to safeguard their cultural heritage.
- Development of partnerships between governments and civil society for sustainable heritage management.
- Programmes to record traditional knowledge and preserve customary cultural values, traditions, and practices should be developed.
- The traditional community values and associated local and indigenous knowledge should be taught and transmitted in the Nigeria basic education.
- The government should build capacities in cultural areas through education and training in the arts, arts and administration, heritage management and cultural entrepreneurship.
- The government should invest in cultural industries to aid in the diversification of economies, and to reinforce and expand cultural confidence and ties with foreign countries.
- A viable culture compass and an ideology rooted in culture be instituted.
- We have to recreate a worthy polity based on the culture and traditions of our people specifically tailored to our peculiarities and in national interaction with the dynamics of globalization.

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