

The Relevance of Culture to the Socio Economic Growth and Development of Nigeria: A Legal Perspective

Mercy O. Erhun
Faculty of Law, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Abstract

Nigeria is an example of a nation born out of a cultural womb foreign to it. As a result, participation of Nigerians in cultural life is poor. Nigeria's lofty overall development aspirations remain largely unachieved as a result of the fact that the country is yet to recognize the pride of place culture occupies in development. Nigeria pledges to protect, preserve and promote the Nigerian cultures which enhance human dignity and which are consistent with the fundamental objectives as provided in Chapter II of the 1999 Constitution as well as to encourage development of technological and scientific studies which enhance cultural values. The Nigerian culture has not been harnessed for the socio-economic growth of the country. As a result, primary means of survival is not guaranteed. This accounts for the downward trend of socio-economic development inspite of laudable measures put in place to attain socio-economic development in Nigeria. Development programme which takes into account the link between cultural diversity which is likely to bring better dividend is lacking. This is what this paper aims to achieve. The paper made use of primary and secondary sources of information from the library. In this paper, issues bordering on culture and development, impact of colonialism on the socio-economic development shall be looked into. This is with the aim to mainstreaming culture into the Nigeria's development agenda.

Keywords: Constitution, Culture, Socio-Economic Development

1. Introduction

Nigeria is blessed with enormous potentials of both human and natural resources. Inspite of this, the country is confronted with one of the greatest challenges facing most nations of the world which is underdevelopment. The quest for development is one of the most critical issues in the Nigerian state. Development involves two basic processes: improving and refining that which is already in existence and adapting same to contemporary requirements and finding solutions to new problems or new forms of solutions to old problems. It is a creative response to social, economic and political affairs. One can only develop what is already in existence but where what is in existence is destroyed there is nothing to develop for you cannot put something on nothing. In Nigeria, cultural values have been thrown to the air and consequently fading away. Culture is seen as falling in the realm of preservation of the heritage of the people rather than been seen as a process of enrichment and renewal of Nigerian values. Consequently, development fails to reconcile with the present and the demands of the challenges of the future. Rather than making use of Nigeria's culture for national building, Nigerian has discarded her rich and enviable cultural heritage for an alien one.

Right from 1960 when Nigeria attained independence, there has been an endless search for development in this country. Nigeria is faced with an appalled state of poverty in the midst of plenty. Economic growth is impeded despite all attempts to achieve socio-economic growth and development. Nigeria's lofty overall development aspirations remain largely unachieved. None of her elegant economic policies have succeeded in resulting in improved welfare for the citizens of the country. Instead, Nigeria remains a sick society. This is reflected in collapse of family institutions, increase in crime, religious crisis, breakdown in social order, decay in social infrastructure, breakdown in law and order etc. The hope of the generality of the people was that the country would grow in leaps and bounds considering the fact that the country is now under the control of indigenous ruling elites. Instead, economic problems have continued to manifest in form of increase in unemployment, increase in poverty, soaring in prices of goods and services etc. Despite various measures taken by successive administrations to stem the tide of economic problems, the Nigerian economy continues to manifest signs of stress and strains as a result of underdevelopment resulting from neglect of the cultural aspect of development. Development in Nigeria fails to reconcile the challenges of the needs of the present with those of future. Nigeria is yet to fully acknowledge the cultural dimension of development. Because of this there has not been adequate sensitization of her policy makers and the public as a whole to the cultural component of development. That which gave order and meaning to past generations have since been lost in Nigeria. What is left in presently is super-imposed by the colonial masters. There can be no true socio-economic development in the absence of culture. The approach of this paper is on how culture can be used to promote socio-economic development in Nigeria.

2. Culture and Development

Development involves two basic processes improving and refining that which is already in existence and

adapting same to contemporary requirements and finding solutions to new problems or new forms of solutions to old problems. It is a creative response to social, economic and political affairs. One can only develop what is already in existence but where what is in existence is destroyed there is nothing to develop for you cannot put something on nothing. As a result of the fact that Nigeria has failed to recognize the place of culture in the attainment of socio-economic development, she has not been able to harness same for national development.

The word culture came from a Latin word *cerele* meaning to cultivate or to tend. It means to take active care of something. Piddington, (1950) defined culture as the sum total of the material and intellectual equipment wherewith a people satisfy or meet their biological or social needs and adapt themselves to their environment. Thompson 1991 viewed culture as a society's total way or pattern of life. The Ministry of Information and Culture of Nigeria, (1988) defined culture as the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours. As noted by Taylor, (1971), culture is that complex whole which include the knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society. Culture is what man interposes between himself and his environment in order to ensure his security and survival (Ayandele, 1981). To Duro Oni, (2001), the word culture was is the embodiments of the attitudes of a people to their traditional values which are essential for factors of development and progress. According to Udu Yakubu (2002) for human beings to build houses, cultivate farms, construct bridges, dams, electricity generating plants, provide qualitative education, manage successful businesses or organizations, control population growth, prevent or cure sicknesses and diseases, ensure social trust, good governance and law and order etc., they need an established critically receptive body of ideas and beliefs, designs, techniques and methodologies rules and regulations. In other words, they need culture. As noted by Tunde Babawale (2007), culture entails all that people have learned and preserved from past collective experience and transmitted into the future by learning. Culture is the primary means of survival and adaptation of man, offering a summation and distillation of the past that provides sound basis for living in the present and marching into the future. Bates et al (1975) are of the view that in the absence of culture man is prone to losing all knowledge of even the basic means of survival and that it will be catastrophic for the prevailing culture of mankind to be wiped out.

An understanding of the cultural aspect of a society is crucial to adapting development approaches to local context and ensuring successful outcomes. Development is not only about economic or material growth or social progress. Economic views cannot be dissociated from other aspects of life. Cultural factor also influence the way humans understand and implement their civic and economic affairs, their relationships to other humans, their histories, the world of nature and most importantly the principles of development. The purpose of development and the criteria by which it may be evaluated are culture-based and culture-bound. Development extends to culture. The culture of the people must be recognized, sustained and preserved in order to give them a sense of belonging in any development agenda. The development process must be viewed from a wider perspective whereby issues of the whole human person, rather than the essentially economic man are incorporated. Development as a strategy for improving the quality of life and the stability of the economy must be viewed from the angle of culture in order to enhance socio-economic development.

Nigeria has pledged to protect, preserve and promote the Nigerian cultures which enhance human dignity and are consistent with the fundamental objectives as provided in Chapter II of the 1999 Constitution and to encourage development of technological and scientific studies which enhance cultural values. One of the targets of the proposed goal of ensuring sustainable consumption and production, is to develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism which creates and promotes local cultures and products. Culture is a catalyst for comprehensive societal change, with the ability of generating positive and sustainable transformations of economic development. It is an important factor in building social inclusion and eradicating poverty, providing for economic growth and active participation in development processes, as well as an essential component of sustainable development.

Culture is a driver for development as well as an important contribution in the reduction of poverty. Participation in the cultural sector and the engagement of cultural values provide important opportunities for development. Culture led development helps to preserve the social fabric, attract investment and improve economic retunes. Development programmes which takes into account the link between cultural diversity is likely to bring better dividend. Culture and historic urban environments are key for achieving sustainable development. Cultural sensitive approach in urban environments promotes social cohesion and cultural pride through participation in local community and urban spaces. An understanding and consideration of the cultural aspect of society is critical to adapting development approaches to local context and ensuring successful outcomes. Cultural rights, heritage, cultural identity, cultural life and the integration of cultural expression are fundamental realities and very important tools which stimulate dialogue and provide legitimacy for collective and participatory governance. Cultural rehabilitation and dialogue are crucial for stabilization and for sustainable development. The integration of cultural expression is a very important tool in stimulating dialogue

and participatory governance. Culture represents a sense of identity, innovation and creativity. Embracing cultural traditions of local communities promotes optimal outcomes for environmental protection.

3. The Impact of Colonialism on The Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria

Colonialism and its dimensional impacts remain one major factor of socio-cultural economic significance which partly accounts for the twist of fate in Nigeria. Bode Onimode, (1985) was of the view that colonial economy was said to be marked by the introduction of socio-economic formulations for social production. The economic foundations of any society shape the ideological outlook of that society. The ideology of any society ought to be an expression of that society. The ideology of a given society is supposed to mirror the internal dynamics of that society. Ideally, the ideology of a given society ought to originate from such society instead of being imposed from an external source. Rather than emanating from the process of internal socio-economic and political dynamics, the Nigerian ideology is a product of colonial imposition and domination. The process of Nigerian autonomous socio-economic development was truncated by the colonial exploiters in a bid to impose the capitalist ideology on the people. There was thus the confrontation of indigenous system with alien economic formation which has generated immense contradictions that virtually destabilized the Nigerian society bringing about an ailing economy which has refused to bow to any remedy so far. As a result of imperialist ideology, dominant Europeans are held in high esteem and technically superior. According to Otonti Nduka (1964), this was what resulted in the struggle to copy anything and every European to the neglect and destruction of anything and everything traditional, thus resulting in hybridization of the Nigerian elite. Colonialism ensured that Nigeria lost the sense of pride and confidence in her own traditions and culture. Every society is organized and directed on the basis of some fundamental principles commonly referred to as ideology.

The main cause of the current underdevelopment of the Nigerian Personality was attributed (Okpo Ojah) to the phenomenon of colonialism which was defined by Could and Kolb (1964) as a form of political, economic, intellectual and even physical control by a small but alien country over another country or a state of inferiority or servitude experienced by a country which is dominated politically, economically and culturally by another and more so called developed country. There is no sense of Nigerian personality. In other words, the sum total of the basic ways a Nigerian feels, thinks, talks and behaves have been thrown away for an unwholesome romance with the lifestyle of the Western world. As a result of harsh restraint deliberately imposed by the European colonial system, the Nigerian personality is bounded. The total cultural expression of what is common to all Nigerians has been eroded. According to Gideon-Cyrus & . Rohio (1973), the colonial system made every effort possible to reduce and in some cases to exterminate the Nigerian personality.

It was asserted by Ogbimi, (2006) that the principal reason why education and related growth-promoted activities were neglected in the developing world is the indoctrination promoted by Western Leaders who promoted different ideas in the developing world in the West. According to Ogbimi, these Western leaders only pretended when they talk of a global economy. In the real sense, they are only interested in promoting the ideas which will sustain economic and political confusion in Nigeria. This accounts for lack of growth in Nigeria. Nigeria's strategy of development is derived from theories of economic, political and philosophical development which have been developed during the colonial and neo-colonial periods to rationalize the colonial patterns of production and organization in general. As noted by Adebayo Adediji, (1975), these alien theories link the rate and direction of internal socio-cultural, economic changes with imports of skills and technology, capital and consumer goods but negative lifestyles.

Cultural imperialism is the most dangerous tool of diplomacy. Nigeria's inability to attain socio-economic development is connected with her non recognition of the primacy of culture which is a function of total development. The very strategies of development which Nigerian government has been pursing since independence have been externally masterminded. The Nigerian personality whose ideals were manifested in a distinct and collective Nigerian identity characterized by unfettered freedom, auto-centric growth and development, global impact and the preservation of Nigeria culture, customs and traditions has been lost.

The underdevelopment of Nigeria is an outcome of the subordination and distortion of Nigeria by the requirements of metropolitan capitalism. According to the orthodox school of thought underdeveloped countries can attain development only if they abandon their traditional features in preference for those of the western developed world. One of a very glaring example is the issue of population. There is this general idea sold to Nigerians by the Western world that unless population is reduced, it will be impossible to attain development. In Nigeria, children are regarded as assets to many poor families because they provide labor usually for farming. Nigeria is a country that is densely populated. High rate of population growth is inevitable in Nigeria. All that is needed is an active population that can make input into the production process. Inspite of Nigeria's high population we can still attain high standard of living by making use of what we have as a means of getting what we do not have. Manual subsistence farming which results in low productivity should give way to mechanized farming. We can go into mechanized farming which can lead to the production of large quantity of food to support the high density of population. This can be achieved by making use of commercial fertilizers, large scale

irrigation and agricultural machinery in order to tackle the problem of infertile land. We can get ourselves involved in high-tech industries. By employing our economic and human resources etc, agricultural productivity can be boosted.

Cultural norms in traditional rural societies of which Nigeria is one commonly sanction the value of large families. Given the above, high rate of population growth is inevitable in Nigeria. Population growth and high economic growth can be made to be mutually supportive. Population was regarded by Ogbimi, (2003) as a multiplier, an active factor in determining the material wealth of a society. In the words of Ogbimi, we can only talk of overpopulation in relation to numbers, resources, technology and the differences between the poor and the rich. According to him, population growth is limited by inability to provide enough food and good health care to support a higher population growth. High population growth is essential for the higher productivity.

4. Conclusion

Culture and development have strong potentials for modulating and accelerating socio-economic development. Nigeria has an enviable culture, full of aspiration and vitality. Despite this, the Nigerian culture and traditional life-style is discard in favour foreign ones. Nigeria's dispositions, organizations, orientations and values are tailored to suit those of Western societies without any form of adaptation to suit our peculiar situation. Nigeria's rich cultural heritage is substituted for an alien socio-economic structures. The general crisis in the Nigerian economy is a logical outcome of the continued subjugation and control of the Nigerian economy by external powers. The trivialization or outright bastardization of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage has done great damage to Nigeria. The Nigeria's cultural diversity remains a treasure largely unexplored in her quest for socio-economic development.

Culture is relevant to Nigeria's socio-economic growth and development. For Nigeria to truly and actually attain the status of a developed nation, there is a need to identify the critical elements of the culture of Nigerians and harness them for national development. There can be no socio-economic development without a strong indigenous foundation. If Nigeria is to be reckoned with we should discontinue from being an appendage to foreign ideas and practices. In order to overcome the next phase of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism which are being euphemistically dubbed "globalization", there is a need for a dynamic cultural orientation.

5. Recommendations

Without a Nigerian identity, Nigerians cannot make proper impact in international affairs. Nigerians should begin to act at both Nigeria's individual and collective interest at any particular time, and be determined to chart her destiny using her own ideology. Nigerians should cultivate, revive and defend the Nigerian personality if Nigeria is to have a rightful place in the harmony of all nations. Nigeria lacks a viable culture compass and an ideology rooted in culture. There is a need to recreate a polity based on the culture and traditions of our people and tailored to her peculiarities and based on the dynamics of globalization and the underlying principles of globalization tailored to suit our peculiar situation. Nigeria must affirm and enrich our cultural identity. There is a need to broaden the participation of Nigerians in cultural life.

There should be a deliberate effort to sensitize the public and policy makers in Nigeria to the adoption of a legal framework that will reflect the cultural components of development. For Nigeria to experience meaningful growth, there must be a synergy between Nigerian traditional values and modernity. Nigerians must be proud of her culture, taste, and values. This is what obtains in China where, even though the country is opened up to capitalist influences, the rudiments of its industrial base were built on Chinese culture and its traditional practices. The diversity of our culture notwithstanding, Nigeria can still make good success story in development through respect for her culture and making her economy to be rooted in her culture by responding guidedly to the dynamics of globalization, information and telecommunication technology like what obtains in Singapore.

Hereditary qualities are fundamental to the survival of any society. Rather than replacing them by any human agent, they are to be improved upon and assisted. Nigeria should strive to develop and maintain Nigerian personality if Nigeria is to be reckoned with in all fields of human endeavour. Lost legacy of Nigerians should be recovered while discarding with passionate enthusiasm towards unprofitable western ideology in the match from the part of dependence to the path of self reliance and self-sufficiency in all facets of life. Nigeria should recapture and re-assert the dignity of Nigerians. This can be done by sticking tenaciously to the Nigerian culture, traditions and customs handed over to Nigerians by our ancestors before the incursion of the Europeans.

Nigerian laws should be revised to reflect the present day aspiration of bring cultural dimensions into our socio-economic development process. Nigerian law makers should be innovative enough to bring issues of culture to bear in their law making process. Judges in Nigeria should rise up to this responsibility in doing what is right by upholding the Nigerian culture as sacred and one to be upheld in the performance of their duties as priests in the temple of justice.

The judiciary is the hope of the common man and for the acceleration of the achievement of the socio-

economic development in Nigeria. Giving the non-justiciability clause under the 1999 Constitution, Nigerian judges should rise to the tasks of elevating culture to its pride of place through judicial interpretation in order to give flavor to the place of culture in the socio-economic development in Nigeria.

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