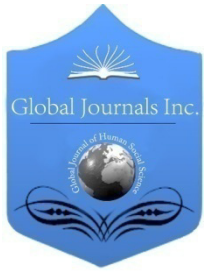
Volume 15 Issue 18
Originally issued as H3



Global Journal of human-social science: H
Interdisciplinary
Volume 15 Issue 3 Version 1.0 Year 2015
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Taking Culture into Account in Development

By Akpomuvie Orhioghene Benedict
Delta state university, Nigeria

Introduction- The essence of development will find its manifestation, its reality and meaning in the extent to which the changing patterns and indicators that we monitor (for example; per capita income, life expectancy, infant mortality, school enrolments and balance of payments) are translated into a real change in the ability of the people to live fuller lives and to have power over their own destinies. As rightly noted by Serageldin (1998), this empowerment includes the power to express themselves to the full richness of their evolving cultural identities….evolving by their own manifest abilities in response to their own wishes and aspirations.

The empowerment idea manifests itself at all levels of societal interaction. It is found in giving voice to the disenfranchised; in allowing the weak and the marginalized to have access to the tools and the materials they need to forge their own destinies. In allowing each and every household the possibility of becoming the producers of their own welfare rather than consumers of others' charity.

GJHSS-H Classification: FOR Code: 209999



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



© 2015. Akpomuvie Orhioghene Benedict. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Taking Culture into Account in Development

Akpomuvie Orhioghene Benedict

I. Introduction

The essence of development will find its manifestation, its reality and meaning in the extent to which the changing patterns and indicators that we monitor (for example; per capita income, life expectancy, infant mortality, school enrolments and balance of payments) are translated into a real change in the ability of the people to live fuller lives and to have power over their own destinies. As rightly noted by Serageldin (1998), this empowerment includes the power to express themselves to the full richness of their evolving cultural identities….evolving by their own manifest abilities in response to their own wishes and aspirations.

The empowerment idea manifests itself at all levels of societal interaction. It is found in giving voice to the disenfranchised; in allowing the weak and the marginalized to have access to the tools and the materials they need to forge their own destinies. In allowing each and every household the possibility of becoming the producers of their own welfare rather than consumers of others' charity.

Salim (1998) contended that each society has its own distinctive system of values that constitute an important part of its culture. A society or community needs to harness and maximize the resourcefulness of its culture in a dynamic manner to develop harmoniously. It is important however to stress that we live in an interdependent world within which each society or culture must strive to keep pace with scientific and technological progress. The challenge according to Salim (1994) lies in determining the ways and means of fostering a synergistic development between science and technology on the one hand, and cultural values on the other. Technology does not have cultural implications and when introducing new technology, due consideration should accordingly be given to the cultural values inherent in a particular society. We are all too familiar with development projects that have failed because they were superimposed on a cultural environment that was not conducive and therefore could not enlist the support of the people concerned.

Modo (1988) note that scholars in Africa have until the late 1980s regarded culture as the main impediment to development in Africa. This was because the concept of culture had not been properly conceptualized, understood and utilized in the development process in Africa. Development, Modo (1998) observed, had hitherto, been seen only in quantitative terms like Gross National Product (GDP) and…Gross National Product (GND) at the expense of those engaged in production i.e. the workers

The debate on the compatibility between cultural values and technological development is also directly linked to the issue of the compatibility between traditional and modern values. Some advocates of the latter, contend that cultural values and traditions are obstacles to modernization. As Salim (1994) rightly observed; rather experiences in development, as in the case of Japan, clearly demonstrate that traditional cultural values and modernism are compatible and that a people can certainly, achieve socioeconomic development in harmony with their beliefs and cultural values. Africa he noted, is proud of its rich and varied cultural heritage. Whether it been in the field of painting and sculpture, music and dance, literature or archaeology, African culture is universally acknowledged and appreciated. This is, indeed, a reflection of the creative genius of the people of Africa, Salim (1994) concluded.

II. Culture and Development Relationship

The culture of a people according to Bashir (1991) is the totality of their experiences, involving their systems of thought and the general heritage arising from their interaction with their social physical environment. Culture is therefore our total being or existence. Our ability to successfully and positively address the issues of culture should be seen as our success in societal actualization and hence development while our inability would be a manifestation of our failure to develop ourselves politically, economically and socially. Bashir (1991) contended that this underscores the close relationship between culture and development.

With the failure of dependent development in Africa, many other countries in the post-cold war world, will want to know what kind of development that does work. Robert (1994) noted that we should take culture into account when discussing development has been known for at least forty years. What is not known he observed is how to take culture into account; both scientifically and practically. The cultural dimension of development is the place to start this discussion.

A clear understanding of the relationship between culture and development will therefore bring

Author: Delta State University Sociology Department Abraka, Delta State. e-mail: bakpomuvie@gmail.com

© 2015 Global Journals Inc. (US)

about an appreciation of the fact that any step towards development should of necessity start with the examination of the people's popular culture and the values inherent in them; for these inform the people's choices in life and hence their general well-being. Bashir (1991) averred that development should therefore been seen as the actualization and popularization of these values; either collectively or individually. The foregoing implicitly suggests that any development process which is based on the values of an alien culture is bound to be problematic.

Examples abound all over Africa where many development projects have failed mainly because social analysts who understand the culture of the people were left out. (Modo, 1994). Cernea (1991) noted that the problem is mainly due to engineering bias. This happens when an overwhelming concern to complete the civil construction, blinds the planners to the social needs of resettled people. For example, Modo (1994) stressed that too many projects have provided for new houses, roads and water supply without taking into account how people will earn a living at the new group site, if the resettled village does not have farming land available around the new settlement. Examples of such faulty projects in Africa due to lack of cultural concern by the handlers include; the Manantali Dan Mali (some 10,000 persons displaced), Mangboto in Togo (12, 000 persons displaced) and the Baardheere Dam Project in Somalis Juba river. Both Manantali and Mangboto projects under estimated both the needs and costs for resettlement. In the Baardeere Dam project, the Italian consulting companies failed to mention what would happen to the significant member of farmers and other inhabitants who would be forced to move by the reservoir submergence (Cernia, 1991).

This article is aimed at advancing the culture research techniques in the design and implementation of development programmes in Africa. It's further geared towards showing that such cultural techniques, has the advantage of putting the people first in development; it enables the people to see themselves as active participants in the design and implementation of projects that are meant to benefit them. Pitt (1976) called the technique 'development from below'. This technique enables the people to use resources within to produce new things.

Bashir (1991) observed that central to the process of socio-economic development is culture. If a people's culture determines their values, norms and general world view, then the role of culture in economic development cannot be over-emphasized. European cultural imperialism which is targeted at dislodging African's indigenous cultures is a calculated attempt at perpetuating dependency in Africa particularly Nigeria. If the values and norms of any society determine its life style and this in turn determine the demand and supply structure in such a society, then no process of economic development can take place without a cultural base (see Bashir, 1991). Development is therefore the realization of the full potentials of that society as dictated by its values. The expression "popular culture" is carefully used here to depict the peoples' culture which in official circles, is often considered as national culture. The more indigenously based such culture is, the better for the society in achieving and sustaining a high level of development.

III. Promoting Cultural Identity

Every region has cultural manifestations that strike deep responsive chords in the people. This occurs according to Serageldin (1991) because they draw upon an authentic heritage that helps define the shared image of self and society that creates a collectivity. The clarity of that cultural identity and its evolving continuity are essential to create an integrated and integrating cultural framework. A cultural identify is integrated in so far as it provides a coherent framework within which norms of behaviour are articulated and integrating insofar as it allows for the incorporation of new elements. Such a cultural framework is to Serageldin (1991), a sine qua non to have relevant, effective institutions rooted in authenticity and tradition yet open to modernity and change. Without such institutions, no real development can take place. Indeed, the lessons of failure in Africa frequently can be traced to the absence of such institutions. More importantly, the absence of a viable cultural framework in this sense tends to translate into an absence of national self-confidence and social fragmentation with Westernized elites and alienated majorities.

Bashir (1991) regrettably noted that the most obvious implications of cultural imperialism as Taylor's study shows, is that African culture particularly that of Nigeria is "overwhelmed" by Western culture (knowledge, belief, art, morals, law and so on). Through the media, alien consumer patterns are being promoted among the people of Africa. Consumer societies have been created in these countries with life styles, values, tasks and inspirations based on models and commodities of the Western industrial countries.

The conviction is that the fate of a victim of cultural imperialism will continue to be decided from outside and in this way, its progress can be retarded, as its production and consumption patterns will be fashioned out in accordance with the needs and values of alien culture. In this way, western nations have come to dominate the economic and political lives of Third World countries.

Sadly, through imperialism of free trade, our indigenous dresses consumption patterns and world views are generally "giving way" to European alternatives or to hybrid cultures which are neither European nor indigenous to the people. From these, we

© 2015 Global Journals Inc. (US)

have been reduced to cultural hybrids whose consumption patterns and world view have been geared towards the consumption of goods produced on the basis of western values. This has happened through the transfer of taste in the course of free trade. All these have led to cultural and material enslavement and by extension, under-development.

It is very pertinent to note that western political, social and economic institutions that have been adopted are not in themselves necessarily incongruent with the achievement of desired national goals. Some of them, when properly used, can assists in the process of development. The problem therefore lies on the way such values have been applied and the interest they have been tailored to serve.

IV. Cultural Approach to Development

The cultural approach to development has been adopted by many countries both in the distant and recent past. Faced with British cultural imperialism which would have perpetuated the backwardness of Germany in the 19th century, Bismarch sensitized his compatriots on the path to national pride and identity through cultural reawakening. Their production goals were tailored towards meeting the values and consumption patterns of Germans and not what Britain wanted. Thus, the Germans looked inward to develop themselves.

Similarly, the Japanese took their destinies in their hands during the reign of Takugowa. Here, a conscious political step was taken to ensure that western cultural imperialism did not thrive. Up to this day, the Japanese have maintained this cultural approach to their development. In China, similar cultural revolutions were taken by the communist party under the aegis of chairman Mao-Tse-Tung.

The last decade marked a turning point in acknowledging the importance of culture in the development process. Etounga-Manguelle (1991) noted that since the beginning of the 1970s, a number of voices at UNESCO have been raised regularly that stressed the importance of the culture in the social, economic and political evolution of contemporary societies. Nonetheless in Africa, thus awareness seemed to focus on reasserting cultural identity, which Africans, rightly or wrongly, believed, was really threatened by the emphasis on purely economic development.

For African countries, particularly Nigeria to develop socially, economically and politically, there is need for a "cultural revolution". This according to Bashir (1991) should of necessity face foreign culture imperialism camouflaged in its free trade philosophy. Forming cultural policy as Nigeria embarked on in 1988 is not enough. Formulating policy is one thing while implementation same is another. Specialized agencies under the Ministry of culture should be recognized to face the challenges of promoting and popularizing the national culture through every available responsible means deemed necessary.

To face the challenges ahead, the various Ministries through its related agencies, should collect and conserve some of our cultural heritage which have the required transformational or adaptation potentials that can enhance our efforts in our developmental quest in the same spirit, traditional institutions should be encouraged to preserve popular customs.

Similarly, through cultural education, respect and pride in a nation's cultural heritages can be restored in the adults and inculcated in the minds of the young ones; thus fostering in them a conscious national identity and patriotism. The starting point towards societal actualization is the inculcation of patriotic feelings in the citizenry. With such feelings, which is the manifestation of love for and dedication to the cause of a nation, the road to greatness is fully guaranteed. Any country with the citizenry not imbued with this feelings, is bound to remain underdeveloped and under the bondage of foreign domination.

V. Conclusion

From the foregoings, it's clear that there is a nexus between culture and development of a nation. It therefore goes that any nation that is interested in her social economic and political advancement or progress should never undermine the role of culture.

Africa is as committed to modernity as it is to its cultural heritage and values. It can therefore ill-afford to replace its cultural values by some so-called world culture to whose elaboration Africa was not given opportunity to contribute. Is it wise or advisable for the world to share one and the same culture? Would a uniform culture not stifle creativity and genius and thus hinder human progress? Rather I choose to believe that it is possible to aim at a world within which common values can be shared while specific cultures develop and in which the specific and the universal can merge and be mutually strengthening and enriching.

References Références Referencias

1. Agbaje, A. (1996), Culture, Corruption and Development. Voices from Africa, 41-51
2. Ayoade, J. (1989), The Cultural Debate in Africa. The Black Scholar, 20:5
3. Bashir, I.L (1991), "Culture and Economic Development in Nigeria; A Study in the Operation and Impacts of Cultural Imperialism" in Culture, Economy and National Development (eds) Bello, S. and Nasidi, Y. Ibadan; Freeman Production.
4. Cernea, M. (1991), "Socio-economic and Cultural Approaches to involuntary Population Settlement". In Hashimoto, M. Guidelines on Lake Management. Volume 2, Japan.

© 2015 Global Journals Inc. (US)

5. Chiegwe, O. (2000), Modernization, Development and Underdevelopment. Benin City; AMBIK PRESS
6. David, P. (1976), Development from Below: Anthropologists and Development Situations: The Hagul, Mouton Press.
7. Ifeyinwa, A.M. (2004), Is There Really a Relationship between Culture and Development? Anthropologist, 6ID; 37-43
8. Mazrui, A.A (1998), Development in a Multicultural Context; Trends and Tensions in Culture and Development in Africa (eds), Seragaldin, I. and Taboroff, J. Washington; International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
9. Modo, I.V.O (1998), Cultural Approach Option to Development Projects in Africa. Uyo: Dorand Publishers.
10. Robert, K. (1998), "Taking Culture into Account; From "Lets" to "How" in Culture and Development in Africa (eds) Serageldin, I. and Taboroff, J. Washington; International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
11. Salim, S.A (1998), Opening Remarks" in Culture, and Development in Africa (eds) Seragaldin, I. and Taboroff, J. Washington; International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
12. Serageldin, I. (1998), "The Challenge of a Holistic Vision in Culture and Development in Africa(eds), Seragaldin, I. amd Taboroff, J. Washington, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

© 2015 Global Journals Inc. (US)