

Galvanizing Culture for Nigeria's Development

Ngozi Ezenagu

Abstract

Culture is an all embracing concept which constitute in its entirety 'the way of life' of a group of people. This involves morals, values, norms, among others, which influence man's perception and invariably affect how he relates with his environment for development. Hitherto, development itself is multifaceted. Therefore, this paper posits that it is only a culture based development that can address the needs of its populace. Any meaningful development must be rooted in the cultural values of the nation in order to retain its identity. Most developing nations like Nigeria are compromising their national identity for the price of development. A retrospect of Nigeria pre-colonial days gave an overview of culture oriented development. The paper conclusively, launched the need for Nigeria to imbibe development compatible to its culture.

Key words: culture, development, national development, Nigeria

Introduction

Members of a community relate through some generally formulated patterns of life. These generally formulated patterns of life put together are known as culture. To talk of culture as a way of life is to assess and comprehend how a people create and recreate their lives in both the material and non-material sense of the word (Bello, 1990:4). The concept, culture, cuts across all facets of human life and endeavour. Practically, it influences people's decision and action taken for the improvement of their standard of living. A positive effort made toward improving human standard of living is termed development. Literally, it focuses on making life better for everyone which requires meeting human basic needs. Steps taken towards the pursuit of a better life is subject to cultural provisions of the nation. In view of this, Bello (1990: 13) asserts that development is culturally-sourced because it is only through the study of earlier developed skills and inventions that we can develop them to a higher level. He further states that:

a clear understanding of the relationship between culture and development will...bring 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 such, for these inform people's choices in life and hence their general well-being.

Development should therefore be seen as the actualization and popularization of these values either collectively or individually (Bello and Nasidi, 1991:259). Apparently, it is inherent for development to concur with the culture of the nation. But in Nigeria we have been unable to support, improve and develop on the rudiments we have; instead we expect a completed development package to be handed to us. Thus, the utter neglect of cultural basis of development accounts for collapse of most Nigeria National development Plans. A survey of countries like Japan and Germany among others paints a clear picture of nations where development was attained on the foundation culture.

In Nigeria, cultural slavery - the pursuit and application of foreign culture - has remained one of the greatest challenges of culture based development in the country. This is because today, an average Nigerian highly esteems western culture over the Nigerian culture. Thus, it is no gainsaying that colonialism is more than mere political domination. The domination pervades the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres and equally alters the nation's attachment to its root. The colonial experience, which is neither peculiar to Nigeria nor to other African countries, has created a situation of cultural subjugation, thereby giving rise to the quest and dominance of western culture. The pursuit of western model of development packaged in its culture has to a large extent popularised all sorts of vices in the country. Although initial steps towards achieving national development in Nigeria was made by the British colonial administration, the success of this move cannot be ascertained. Undeniably, the diverse colourful cultures of Nigeria presuppose a blueprint that would mould the life style of people towards harnessing their creative initiative for their benefit.

Conceptual clarification

The term culture is a universal phenomenon, with multifarious meanings, interpretations and applications in the society. Generally, culture is perceived as the totality of people's way of life. Culture, in its entirety, has man as its focus. It is a word that defines man's relationship, communion and adaptation to its environment. Simply put, culture is the totality of man's experiences, involving their system of thought (or world views) and general heritage arising from their interaction with their social physical environment (Bello and Nasidi, 1991: 258). Indeed, culture is the précis of man's interaction with his environment. Kemper (1971: 112) opines that culture is "the sum total of belief, knowledge, attitudes of mind and customs to which a person is exposed during his social conditioning". Through contact with particular culture, an individual learns habits of behaviour and thought. The culture of his society will define the same objects or situations differently. This definition illustrates cultural diversity; a situation whereby each culture has its own distinct meaning of the same object different from others.

Nkom (2008: 3) gives a broad definition of culture in the following words:

Culture encompasses the world view of a people; the cognitive processes which structure the thinking and mindset of the people; the linguistic forms through which they communicate and express their ideas; the aesthetic manifestation of their feelings and creativity in art, music, dance and other aesthetic forms; the behavioural patterns which shape their actions; and the patterns of social structure which govern their ways of interacting with individuals, groups and peoples both within and outside their society.

To this end, culture gives meaning to human life, guides and directs man's behaviour within the society.

Development, regardless of how it is defined, ultimately entails an attempt to build a "better society: a society characterised by greater material prosperity and better life chances for the people; a society characterised by significant improvements in the people's capacity to understand and to tap the resources of their environment for their own good and the good of humanity; a society which opens up new opportunities for personal uplift and collective advancement; and a society in which creativity, productivity and popular participation are enhanced" (Nkom, 2008: 3). To this, development is a global undertaking with a multi-dimensional effect visible in the economy, society and culture of a community. The cultural dimension is a long-neglected aspect of development; the challenge, therefore, lies in fostering a synergistic development between science and technology, and cultural values. Indeed, it is a waste of assets and expertise for a nation to pursue a development model that would neglect the grass root. Every step taken under the guise of development must answer to the needs of the populace. Similarly, such steps should be able to derive the means and motivation for development from the people's cultural roots. The focal point of development, from a cultural perspective is the citizens' wellbeing in its entirety. This is in contrast to the views of most economists who evaluate development from the angle of growth in productivity of a nation. Therefore, development is limited when evaluated based on economic productivity of a nation.

In Osagie's (1985:129) view, "development is the qualitative and quantitative positive transformation of the lives of a people that does not only enhance their material wellbeing but also ensures their social well-being, including the restoration of human dignity". This implies that development centres on better life for the populace. From a cultural perception, Bello (1990: 15) states that "a culture of development pre-supposes systematic improvement and refinement of existing practices, informed by knowledge acquired through contacts with others, as occasioned by new needs and circumstances". This implies that development is more visible when it emanates from the culture of the people. Such development model is people-oriented. Thus, any meaningful national development must have men as its means and end (Bello, 1990: 4). This emphasizes the importance of people's participation in development as ideal for National development. To this end, Bello and Nasidi (1991: 25) assert that "National development is a process of enhancing the productive forces of a country for the actualisation of more prosperous and meaningful life for all its citizens". Simply put, National development is a deliberate effort of man to meaningfully utilise material resources from all works of life towards attaining a common goal (better life).

Unity in diversity: The bedrock of Nigeria's development

The contemporary Nigerian society as a Nation is the product of the amalgamation of various ethnic groups by the British colonial administration in 1914. This move was initiated as a result of the administrative inconveniences of culture pluralism (Ajayi, 1972: 223). This ethnic amalgamation did not take into cognizance the reality of Nigeria's cultural diversity. Therefore, following the heterogeneous nature of the country's cultural background, the amalgamation of 1914 cannot be adjudged successful; judging from the tribal differences coupled with the dialectical differences. Consequently, this diversity of culture at the ethnic level easily conforms to development which implies that what we have today is more of ethnic development rather than national development. For instance, our past presidents most times directly channel funds towards the development of his ethnic group at the expense of others.

However, despite the prevalence of cultural diversity, national development could be attained by adopting the concept of unity in diversity. This involves the mobilization of the intrinsic values of the various ethnic groups to initiate programmes geared towards national integration. Qualitative contributions from scholars of different ethnic background give room for the evaluation of different developmental strategies and the option to opt for that which is most feasible. In this context, Bello (1990:360) states that "Nigeria's cultural diversity is an asset in its development and its efforts to build a united nation". In his opinion, diversity of culture and subcultures have always provided the precondition for the development of higher cultures in the way that exogamous marriages ensure stronger and healthier species than endogamous marriages. Similarly, pluralism always provides us with various options in terms of development in the form of skills, techniques, values institution and organisational systems. When different ethnic groups independently utilise both its human and material resources effectively it improves quality of life. Put together, if all the ethnic groups in Nigeria would pursue development at its grass root level imbibing cultural measures, definitely, national development would be attained.

Culture and the Nigerian Society

Culture played an active role in the development of the Nigerian society during the pre-colonial era. The different ethnic groups lived in respect to the culture of the land. Communities were hedged with sanctions, notably taboos, the act of forbidding certain attitudes and activities. Through this medium, communities were purged off societal ills which hinder sincere development. With the existence of sanctions, acts such as bribery, corruption, embezzlement, and fraud were mostly heard in words of advice not seen because of the severity of punishment meted out to offenders by the gods. Rape desecrates the land; whether caught or not, offenders are brought to book. In case of manslaughter or accidental murder, the murderer could be exiled from the community as illustrated in the story of 'Okonkwo' in the novel, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe.

Thus, during the period of colonial era, the various communities that make up the territory now referred to as Nigeria could be adjudged sacrosanct following the divine undertone of its system of justice. Apparently, the gods, through ordained priests were considered as judges who presided over various issues in the traditional African court (court). In this context, oath-taking

was a serious matter because no one dared swear an oath falsely in the shrine without incurring the wrath of the gods. The leaders of traditional institutions during their initiation rite would be made to swear an oath of truthfulness which controlled their action while in office. Unlike our leaders of today whose oath of office is taken lightly because it was not sworn to any deity who would punish defaulters. Such oaths are merely sworn in the court as a mere perquisite for swearing-in into any government office. Evidently, during the pre-colonial era the different institutions which made up the traditional community worked together to ensure unity, which was considered a prerequisite for the attainment of national development.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in Nigeria today, traditional norms which are necessary for nation building have been successfully substituted with Western culture. This is one of the resultant effects of colonialism. In line with the above, Nkom (2008: 4) notes that "since independence, the country's development efforts seems to have been informed by the modernisation philosophy of "catching-up" with the west...an euphemism for westernisation". The net effect of these attitudes constitutes what has put our development efforts on a wrong footing (Osagie, 1985: 135). People live after the pattern of western culture some of whose principles are not compatible with Nigerian culture. For instance, we have borrowed the Western profit oriented motive but lack the enthusiasm for genuine wealth accumulation. That is why our past leaders fear being probed. Nigeria has invariably become a dumping ground of all sorts of inferior western technological appliances yet our university laboratories made for invention are dilapidating for lack of use. Our political life is not spared as winners were already declared even before the election. We emulated democracy yet failed to imbibe the spirit of fairness and justice which are attributes of politics in pre-colonial Nigeria. The quest for development in Nigeria is a mere pursuit of western model life without its attendant cultural environment. If only we can imbibe western model of development along with its maintenance culture then we would become westernized in all spheres of life but picking one at the expense of the other is disastrous. The effect has turned Nigeria into an immoral jungle where corruption is the order of the day and encouraged in all departments of life from bribery and election scandals to military coups, drugs abuse and armed robbery (Okoye, 1992: 41). With all these vices, policies on National development cannot be efficiently and effectively implemented. History has recalled that Nigerian politics is characterised by selfishness, tribalism and all sorts of immorality. The political administration of this country since independence has been marked by political wrangling and corrupt practices by our leaders. As far as Nigerian politics is concerned morality and conscience are not in the political dictionary.

Furthermore, the quest for materialism hinders development because when materialism enters the door of any nation, honesty and fair play are compelled to go out through the window (Nweke, 1983:10). This can be seen in cases when loan given to farmers by the Government to improve traditional agricultural system for adequate food production is growing fat in the bank account of government officials. Contractors divert public funds disbursed for infrastructural development to other private purposes. In quest to build sky scrapers, and ride luxurious cars, men produce and market fake products including drugs at the expense of other people's life just for money. Civil right exists theoretically because practically people swear oath falsely and buy

justice. There is no doubt that without holding tenaciously to culture (that is a distinct way of life which some people have fashioned out for themselves in the process of creating a suitable institutional and normative framework for regulating social relationship) to mould and order societal life, national development might only be heard but never accomplished.

Implication of Western Influence on the Nigerian culture

Imperialism, the parent of colonialism, with neo-colonialism as its final state, denotes an essentially western influence over the social, economic and cultural spheres of another country (Osagie, 1985: 131). The westernisation of the Nigerian society which started with colonization was at first an act of subjugation but over time permeated into cultural sphere of the country only to be accorded preference over traditional culture. It is therefore, not surprising that one of the most profound legacies of colonialism was inferiorisation of African indigenous cultures and the deliberate attempt to gradually replace them with western cultural values. This fairly elucidates the paradox of the Nigerian quest for western pattern of development.

In essence, every successful developmental strategy is nurtured and sustained by an enabling cultural environment without which it would be difficult to implement. The practice of implementing western model of development has left Nigeria impoverished. Such trends are counterproductive. Nigerian culture has undergone serve modification with adaptation since its contact with the Europeans during the colonial era. Ever since then and even till date, Nigerian culture is overwhelmed by western culture (knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, etc) (Bello and Nasidi, 1991: 261). Consequently, 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 an alien culture (Bello and Nasidi, 1991: 261). The Western model of development which Nigeria has been mimicking since independence has actually aggravated poverty, inequality and ecological disaster in the country which in turn have led to social disintegration and cultural alienation. The acceptance of this model of development by the elites reflects their consumerist longing for the glamorous, materialistic and individualistic life style of the West (Nkom, 2008: 8). Such life style is visible in our preference for western made products over locally or indigenous products of Nigeria. Today, foreign rice is high in demand over locally cultivated rice. Unfortunately, even toothpick, product of popular chewing stick, is equally being imported. With these, our domestic productive force is being discouraged and stand chances of extinction.

However, the totality of foreign culture is not awful because when properly used can assist in the process of real development. The problem lies in the way such values have been applied and the interest they have been tailored to serve. Obviously, western culture in Nigerian context serves as the key that opens the door to western luxurious life. In this vein, what we actually call development is all the necessities of life which abound in West. To this Nnoli (1981: 21) stresses that "Nigerian academic, social, political and military leaders still look at the development of their country in terms of seeking to achieve many of the conditions of good life in western Europe, America and Japan". These include industrialisation, economic affluence, military hegemony, advanced technology, urbanisation and the parliamentary political process. Erroneously,

these luxuries, to most Nigerians, are an indicator of development. Thus, it is no gainsaying that Nigerians only seek to import the western world into the country in the pursuit of national development. The failure rate of such pursuit is evident in the abandonment of so many developmental projects in the country. In the light of the above, this paper upholds the need for Nigerians to adopt culture oriented development plans.

The Application of Culture in National Development

Culture as a way of life is the product of man's interaction with his environment. It is a form of knowledge associated with a group of people though distinct to a specific people yet similar amongst its neighbours. As the standard blueprint for development, it encompasses various skills and technical know-how of a people. It is pertinent to note here that the potency of national development is domicile in the culture of the land. The visibility of development requires uniformity of purpose foremost. Although in Nigeria we have tended to emphasize issues that tend to divide us but we can start to explore our cultural diversity and galvanize them in a manner that would be relevant for national development. The rich cultural heritage could be expanded to pull Nigerians together in order to build a united, strong and dynamic nation (Obiajulu and Obi, 2003: 342). It is therefore, not surprising that culture unifies the goal of a community such as, economic, social, educational, religious, among others. In pre-colonial Nigeria, the culture of the land pervades all works of life.

Indeed, culture is an indispensable factor in the issue of nation building. It influences one's value and choice in identifying certain needs as well as the medium through which such needs are met. Being the totality of the way of life of the people, it could be exploited for national development. For instance, the non-material culture such as music, folklores, dance, songs and so on, have over time been harnessed by Nigerian musical artists to immortalise heroic deeds of Nigeria's past Nationalists. Notable Nigerian musical artists like late Fela Anikulapo Kuti and late Sonny Okosun known to have used the message of their music to appraise the activities of Nigerian leaders. Such public criticism has helped to checkmate the anti-developmental activities of government officials. Similarly, the story line of such songs will motivate the youth to aspire to be like their past heroes contributing their quota to national development.

Cultural activities could be amassed for the accomplishment of national development in Nigeria by harnessing traditional activities like festivals (an amalgamation of cultural display). Today, Nigeria's huge cultural heritage remains largely untapped. This constitutes one of the motivating factors that have turned Nigeria into a tourist destination. The exploitation of these cultural resources for tourism development led to the initiation of the famous Abuja carnival - glamorous cultural display of different cultural fiesta, indigenous dance styles, dressing, music and songs of the various ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. The declaration of Osun Osogbo sacred grove and Surukur cultural landscape respectively as World Heritage Sites have increased tourist traffic in the country. Inevitably, culture has a strong and strategic economic role in national development. Nigeria can generate a lot of revenue from the sales of its cultural property which is today regarded as souvenirs. These include: home videos (Nollywood films), indigenous craft items, indigenous textile fabrics, local cuisines, and other cultural artifacts.

Also, the utilization of all the available cultural and natural resources of various ethnic groups in Nigeria would promote economic growth. In the area of agriculture, traditional farming techniques can be transformed to modern farming to ensure greater percentage of food production. Evidently, the traditional medicine is fast growing and gaining recognition due to the side-effect of most orthodox drugs. This has increased the demand for traditional medicine as a good medium for maintaining the health of the nation. In view of this, countries like China and India are widely known for herbal drugs which promote public health and longevity. Similarly, Nigeria's traditional medicine can be exploited to supplement western medicine.

Equally, indigenous technology comprising mainly of traditional skill and techniques as Bello and Nasidi (1991:35) note is an asset to the nation. Their recognition, development and application have been the main basis for technological specialisation, improvement and excellence of many countries in the area of production of industrial consumer items. For instance, the Yoruba *Aso ofi* textile weaving which is deeply rooted in early traditional practices can be modernised for increased productivity and employment of labour. In addition, the development of indigenous technology to suit contemporary needs will to a great length improve the standard of living in the country. The modernisation and increase in patronage of Nigeria's vanishing indigenous technology such as blacksmith, wood carving, leather works, cloth weaving and others, will ensure grass root development. These indigenous expertise are basically rural based, their advancement will promote rural development. The improvement of traditional knowledge especially in the area of local rice production will increase its patronage. This will go a long way in curtailing the rate of foreign rice importation in the country.

Furthermore, culture determines the nature and quality of development of a nation. The material resources of culture is the product of cultural skills and techniques while non-material culture dictates the pace and quality of achievement attained by putting cultural skills and expertise to work. In Nigeria, the speed of technological advancement has been greatly marred by the outcome of cultural negligence. Cultural values checkmate politics for the benefit of national development. In essence, a well cultured leader will work towards the maintenance of political stability because political crisis if not checked might end in a civil crisis which will lead to the destruction of lives and property. It is imperative for a good Nigerian leader to carry the people along and should neither embark on ethnic development nor divert public funds to private accounts. He should ensure that public funds are well disbursed. His oath of office should be revered as in the past. By so doing, such leader will be able to combat societal ills.

In addition, culture is an essential factor in developing social character. In this vein, Bello (1990:54) opines that "every type of development has its social basis and character...usually defined by the various cultural elements created and fused through man's creativity encompassing philosophy, values, ethics, order and discipline". Nigerian culture encompasses certain values which cut across all its ethnic groups. These values are the principle of truthfulness, respect, discipline, hard work, loyalty, among other things. When these values are imbibed, the moral fabric of the country will be strengthened.

Subsequently, a meaningful development cannot take place without taking cognizance of traditional norms and values the absences of which a culture of corruption, embezzlement,

fraud, armed robbery, bribery, prostitution, examination malpractices, and injustice will be prevalent in the society. Today, it is not surprising that most Nigerians view development from the get rich quick syndrome, luxurious cars, skyscraper houses, wealth, and so on. The quest for the imitation of western flamboyant life style without imitating the attendant western culture of business acumen has given rise to the negligence of loyalty and faithfulness for personal enrichment. Accordingly, it is only when people are culture conscious that all the vices which are anti-development can be eradicated. As it stands today, Nigeria in her pursuit of national development is at a cross road caught between the web of imbibing western culture and her own traditional values. Thus, the complete assimilation of western culture in substitute for Nigeria traditional value to attain national development is futile. That Nigeria is a developing nation which employs the services of technological experts from the western world does not imply the negligence of its traditional values. Rather it must seek to imbibe a culture of development which is viable to her own culture by blending western culture and traditional values to achieve humane and unbiased development.

Conclusion

Culture builds a people and its deficiency destroys a nation. We cannot view it outside the contribution it makes to social development. There is a consensus that the key to our national development consists mainly in our ability to harness relevant cultural values, attitudes and skills necessary for national integration. This indeed is a precondition for the evolution of national development.

A retrospect of Nigeria's cultural past will resuscitate cultural models which we can adapt and utilize for the attainment of national development. Studying these past cultural experiences will properly channel the course of development as we learn from such experiences by averting the mistakes of the past, imbibing and improving on its achievements. Development is people-oriented while culture is people-centred. In order to achieve a workable development model, development must be focused on the people. Therefore, we must be willing to have our minds renewed, rededicate ourselves to the service of our country and be ready to make the necessary sacrifices. The culture of any given people if properly harnessed by the people with the supplement of an accepted foreign culture will go a long way in enhancing national development.

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