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## **CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper dwells on culture and development in Nigeria. It focuses essentially on non-material cultural traits, which pertains to values, norms, beliefs, etc, in various societal systems such as: political, economic, religious and the social value-system, that are inimical to development strides in Nigeria. Structural Functionalism has been adopted as the theoretical instrument for its analysis. The paper establishes that culture is the spring-board from which virtually all development policies in almost all societal systems emerge. It thus, recommend that greater attention be paid to the Theatre for Development, which serves as an avenue for exploring the numerous Nigerian cultures for a culturally based development and media campaigns should be promoted for the restoration, preservation and improvement on positive Nigerian cultural values. This, the paper conclude, as the obligation of all Nigerians.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria is a conglomeration of more than two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups with their respective cultures (Corporate Nigeria, 2008). Reducibly, therefore, Nigeria is a multi-cultural society and the role of these cultures in Nigeria's development is noteworthy. For instance; these cultures constitute the foundation upon which national institutional cultures such as: political culture, economic culture, religious culture and social culture exist and operate. In this light, therefore, it is safe to assert that culture is the foundation or spring-board of all development policies whether educational, social, political and economical (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1988). However, some cultural traits are inimical to societal development. Nevertheless, scholars have recognized culture, more than any other factor, as germane to the transformation and/or development of societies across the world (Akav & Avanger, 2010), and Nigeria is not an exception. Accordingly, the major concern of this paper is to examine the intricate in the relationship between culture and development in Nigeria. The focus will be on the nature of non-material culture such as: norms, values, traditions, customs, etc, in the political, religious, economic and social system, that are inimical to development in Nigeria.

### **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

**Culture:** According to Geertz (1975), culture denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions, expressed in symbolic forms by means of which human beings communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about life and attitudes to life. This definition serves a clarification function because it presents culture as consisting of the non-material traits such as: ideas, norms, values and material traits such as: cloths, houses, etc. this underscores the fact that non-

material cultural traits determines, not only the nature and quality of material cultural traits, but also, how material culture is utilized or handled.

**Development:** It is important to clarify that the phenomenon of development transcends economic growth, which was erroneously considered by classical economists to be synonymous to development, essentially because of the primary role of economic forces in facilitating societal development. However, in recent years, a number of economists have come to recognize that gross statistics sometimes obscure the essence of the problem of development, because development is essentially about people and their 'quality and quantity' of life. (Ada, 2011). It is in this light that Cairncross posited in Ada (2011), that "the key to development lies in men's mind, in the institutions in which their thinking finds expression and in the play of opportunity on ideas and institutions". This idealistic conception entails that the nature, quality, quantity, dimension and rate of development of any society is predicated on the nature of the ideas, values, norms, etc that constitute its non-material culture. Development, therefore, entails not only improvement in economic growth and/or material possession and favorable living conditions of a people, but also, an improvement in the knowledge/ideas, values, norm and the entire non-material culture of a people. That is to say that development, pertaining to culture, consist the activity of removing the cultural traits that impedes on efforts to a higher living standard and to adopt and improve on cultural traits that will gear towards higher living standard and good quality of life of a people.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

It has been established, that Nigeria is a multi-cultural society and these cultures function for the survival and development of Nigeria. This suggests, invariably, that structural functionalism will serve as a useful theoretical instrument for a rewarding analysis on culture and development in Nigeria. Talcott Parsons, who was greatly influenced by the works of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, was a key figure in the development of Structural Functionalism. Functionalists conceive the society as a vast network of connected parts, each of which helps to maintain the system as a whole (Schaefer, 2005). Functionalism also holds that conflict is a normal part of all healthy systems and is insignificant, especially when its rate of increment is not high. That conflict, at its minimal level rather, contributes to the survival, stability and development of the system or society. Going by the functionalist perspective, it is crystal clear that the diverse cultures in Nigeria are fragments and/or parts that constitute the Nigerian national political, social, educational, economic culture, etc, that are functioning for the survival, stability and development of Nigeria. Of course, there are some cultural traits that are dysfunctional, in the sense that, they work against the stability and development of the Nigerian society. In the light of the functionalists, therefore, such cultural traits, in its negligible level, have some contributive importance to Nigeria's development. However, the rate of increment of the negative cultural traits is fast becoming dysfunctional to development in Nigeria.

### **The Political System**

Political culture refers to those aspects of a culture which have impact of some sort on political traditions, behaviors, political institutions and their operations. It includes the synthesis of both new and old values, beliefs and attitudes (Michael, B. in Adagba, 2008). I agree with this conception of political culture because it underscores emphasis on the accumulated values that determine behaviors and attitudes, which in turn, constitute political structures or traditions operated in political institutions. If the values of political culture are negative, then it follows, therefore, that negative political attitudes, structures and traditions that are inimical to societal development will inadvertently spring into operation in the political institution. Such is the case in Nigeria, where many negative political cultural traits or values such as: patrimonialism, clientelism, etc, are increasingly taking over the Nigerian political system. Patrimonialism is a political system in which state officers appropriate their offices for personal benefits and those of their supporters (Theobald, 1982). In this political system, it is easy to observe that public office holders misappropriate development funds by diverting it to build personal empires. This practice has come to be institutionalized in the Nigerian democratic system, such that it is increasingly weakening the democratic development values and/or structure. Patrimonialism is similar to clientelism, which refers to a complex chain of personal bonds between political patrons or bosses and their individual clients or followers. These bonds are founded on mutual material advantage; the patron furnishes excludable resources (money, jobs) to dependents and accomplices in return for their support and cooperation (Derick & Arthur, 2002).

Contemporarily, rigging of elections is fast becoming a political norm, tradition and more or less a political culture in Nigeria. Election rigging, according to Aluko (2002), involves series of activities such as: connivance with and the 'settlement' of electoral officials in order to manipulate or falsify election figures, buying of votes or even voters' cards, intimidations and threats to life, etc. In recent times, it appears that elections are rigged with the intent of ensuring that a political delegated candidate (other than an elected candidate) succeeds the incumbent official, in the bid to foster the reign of the 'patrimonial empire', against the conventional process of free and fair election. On another note, policy/project discontinuity is another trait in the Nigerian political system which has virtually become part of the Nigerian political culture that seriously works against the development strides of the country. Development plans at the inception of many governmental tenure or regimes hardly indicate intensions or plans for continuing with the preceding development regime's policies/projects.

### **The Religious System**

Christianity, Islam and Traditional religions are the dominant religious organizations in Nigeria. Given that these and other religions in Nigeria preach and teach the virtue of love and peaceful co-existence of mankind, it is natural to expect that such religious beliefs and teachings will create a socio-moral environment which will be conducive for development. Unfortunately, the reality is rather on the contrary. Of course, I agree with Akav and Avanger (2010), when they observed that:

*Religion has been politicized, and more often than not used to achieve political ends by men in positions of power and authority. This has often led to clashes between Muslims and Christians, which has gone a long way in creating an enabling environment for national retrogression.*

Again, some religious doctrines or values, needs to be reconsidered, because of such values or doctrines' instrumentality in producing a pro-violent mindset in those who subscribe to it. For instance: the Islamic principle of Holy War (Al-Jihad), which according to Abd Al-masih (1991), is the doctrinal obligation of all Muslims to fight against unbelievers (non-Muslims).

### **The Economic System**

It will not be wrong to assert that many Nigerians live in ignorance and/or negation of one, some or all of the capitalist development values which include: hard-work, savings and investment/reinvestment. This is because many Nigerians have given into the life style of 'conspicuous consumption', by which the economic culture of hard-work, savings and investment is de-emphasized. This, thereby, gives room for a culture of luxurious living. Flowing from the above, Benue State has, in recent times, witnessed the increase in beer parlors and churches (Wegh, Avanger and Mwaraan, 2011). The beer parlors provide an avenue by which people lavish their earnings on alcoholic drinks and pleasure pursuits, while some churches continue to provide a false hope for prosperity, essentially through the contemporary Pentecostal religious value of 'seed-sowing'. By this religious value, the clergy convinces his congregation that the best place to make profitable investment is in the church organization. To this end, even the financial capital possessed by members of such churches, which would have been used for some practical economic investment, is lost. Furthermore, the high level of financial expenditure on some festivities and/or ceremonies such as: marriage, burials, etc does not leave many people with finances to make investment for self and societal development. On another note, the capitalist economic culture which emphasizes private ownership of property is chiefly instrumental in producing the value of individualism. In Nigeria, therefore, it is unfortunate that due to the individualistic value that is strongly associated with greed and selfishness, coupled with the over-dependence of the economy on the government, capitalism as an economic culture has rather found collaboration with corruption, to promote mindless economic and political exploitation culture. It is in this regard that Akav & Avanger (2010), submitted that the dependent capitalist culture has engendered national retrogression in Nigeria to a large extent.

### **The Social-value System**

Values are general ideas that people share about what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Of course, the values, that people hold, turn to color their overall way of life; they transcend any one particular situation (Craig, Donald & Suzanne, 1994). Nigeria as a nation state and a people also has good values such as: unity, equality, honesty, discipline, etc. Regrettably, many of these good values have been corrupted by bad values that run counter to the good values. For instance; the value of tribalism in the Nigerian political culture, by which many Nigerians pay stronger allegiance to the solidarity of their ethnic

nationality than the national solidarity, has been found to corrupt the minds of many Nigerians and consequently, prompting a de-emphasis of the value of patriotism and national unity. Of course, it is true that the nature of values of a people actually determines the nature of their attitude and character. This is obvious in Nigeria, where, due to the corrupt value-system, the 'Nigerian factor', by which people are treated with contempt, disrespect, dishonesty, etc, has become dominant in the character and attitude of many Nigerians. Indeed, another reason for value-system corruption is, as maintained by Abekhale (2011), that our rich cultural (norms and values) practices have been kept in oblivion and allowed to decay, while foreign cultures held sway. That many Nigerians have embraced foreign cultural values that encourage new morality, whereby, everyone is free to choose what he/she deems fit. Of course, such a liberal morality underscores the foundation of a disordered society, which is chiefly characterized by disrespect to rules and even constituted authority. Given that a peaceful and disciplined social-moral environment is germane to development, it becomes apparent that, with the presence of a liberal morality as a moral foundation in contemporary Nigeria, the question of development is indeed becoming more complex and thus, problematic.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has established that culture is the spring-board from which, virtually, all development policies in all societal institutions emerge. In this wise, non-material culture which pertains to norms, values, traditions, customs, is crucial and indispensable for Nigeria's development. Be that as it may, it will be rewarding to conclude that the obligation of phasing out cultural traits that are inimical to development in Nigeria is of all Nigerians and equally, the obligation of adopting, preserving and improving on cultural traits that facilitate development is of all Nigerians. This is because every Nigerian belongs to Nigeria, which is unarguably, a multicultural society.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It pertinent to reiterate that, Africans believe that development must be consistent with their fundamental socio-cultural traits and only then can the enthusiasm and creative potentials of the people be mobilized (Akav and Avanger, 2010). This underscores the indispensability of culture in any given process of development in Nigeria and elsewhere. Accordingly, therefore, adequate attention must be paid to the Theatre for Development which is to be a melting-pot for virtually all Nigerian non-material cultural forms such as: music, dance, songs, proverbs, drama, cultural history, norms, values, etc. Such cultural base development programme will undoubtedly help in addressing the problem of corrupt cultural traits that are inimical to development. Accordingly, media organizations are to be the frontiers in the media campaigns pertaining to the restoration, preservation and improvement on Nigerian cultural systems. It is in this light that Alachi and Ajene in Adagba (2008), submitted that indigenous cultural forms could be used to correct deviant behavior, preserve cherished values and import new ideas in development.

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