Challenges of Cultural Resources Management in Nigeria: A Critique

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Abstract

As a matter of fact, the antiquities of a nation represents a major repository of a people's cultural heritage, and remains the only veritable tool with which "man" learns and understands the cultural practices and way of life of his forefathers. A great deal of the nation's valuable resources has suffered abject neglect and treated with levity over the decades. Besides, they have suffered same challenges from westernization and Christianity, subsequently, losses through stealing and smuggling. This paper evaluates the usefulness of cultural resources in Nigeria's development, and the challenges militating against their preservation. Most of these impediments were blamed on the government's inability to provide the needed infrastructure and security. Much as it is recognized that government has made some moves in this direction, the input is yet to be well felt. The responsibility for proper management of resources in antiquity should not be limited to the Federal government. More contributions are expected from both the state and local governments, traditional rulers, and the custodians of culture in the rural villages. Again, the NGOs should appreciate the importance of this task and contribute their own quota. It was concluded that the rich cultural resources with which Nigeria is endowed can make significant impact to the nation's economy if properly managed and effectively developed for tourism and other intellectual/spiritual fulfillments.
Keywords: Cultural Properties, Tourism Management, Antiquities, Museums, Archaeological Sites.

Introduction

The nation's valued cultural resources, which are pivotal for tourism development world-wide have remained in a state of disrepair. Consequently, they have been exposed to the dangers of burglary, smuggling, illicit trade, vandalization, and in some cases, total destruction.

By way of definition, cultural resources are those tangible and intangible aspects of a cultural system both living and dead, that are

valued by or representative of a given culture or that contain information about a culture (Wikipedia contributors, 2014). They refer to those rich non-material and material attributes acquired within a society and transmitted through generations, including their diverse beliefs, festivals, diets, architecture, dances, drama, iron works, wood and stone carvings (Okpoko and Okpoko, 2002; Lipe, 1984:1). Some of the cultural resources are ethnographic while others are archaeological.

The bone of contention in this paper is that most of these resources have suffered abject neglect either in the storehouse (museum), or in the hands of the custodians. As a matter of fact, the concern about archaeological site destruction, looting and vandalization dates back to several decades yet, a more proactive measure towards cultural resource management is yet in view. Cultural resource management is essentially a process by which the protection and management of the multitudinous but scarce elements of cultural heritage are given some considerations in a modern world, with an expanding population and expanding needs (King, 2002:1). It involves those practices that promote preservation, conservation and enlightened use of archaeological and ethnographic resources for research, entertainment and educational purposes. A lot of attempts have been made in this direction, but a lot is still desired.

The responsibility of collecting, preserving and conserving Nigeria's cultural artifacts and historical monuments was vested on the National Commission for Museums and Monuments by Decree No. 77 of 1979. The nation's famed art-treasures are housed in the art galleries and museums located across the country and presently, Nigeria has 60 national museums and 25 scheduled local antiquities. It is envisaged that with a critical analysis of previous efforts, and the appreciation of the existing problems, a more proactive measures will be developed by the citizens of this country, more especially the organs who are responsible for funding the cultural institutions and those in charge of the protection and preservation of Nigerian's cultural properties.

It is the intention of this paper to consider the usefulness of cultural resources in Nigeria's development and the challenges militating against their preservation, and recommend some proactive measures to this effect.

Importance of Cultural Resources

The numerous cultural resources in Nigeria are valued for the varied functions they perform.

Potentials for Tourism

The potentials of cultural resources in tourism development are discernable from the intrinsic ability of cultural resources to appeal to observers.

Traditional festival is one of the rich cultural resources with which Nigeria is endowed, and this ranges from fishing and new yam festivals, to rites of passage and many others. The importance of festivals to the people and tourism development cannot be exhausted. It serves to give a community or cultural groups a sense of identity, dignity, continuity and binds societies together. Festivals which are marked with massive home coming promote both family re-union and serves as an avenue for the meeting of old and new friends. During festivals, certain preparations are made which include clearing and cleaning of rural roads, market squares and homes, and these contribute to the aesthetics of the local environment. Traditional festivals contribute to peace keeping and provide a period for jubilation. Above all, festivals have entertainment and relaxation values, as foods and drinks are provided in abundance. Dancing, masquerading, wrestling, drumming and singing of native songs, as well as role reversal are usually in display. Furthermore, material cultures have also been an important area of appeal to visitors. For example, the artistic exploits of Nok culture and its terracotta sculptures have continued to generate more touristic interest. This sculpture has evoked remarkable admirations for the artists in Nok and raised their image to an international standard (Okpoko and Okpoko, 2002). Archaeological sites also constitute potential centers of tourist attraction. Examples include iron smelting sites (Umundu, Lejjer in Nsukka, Opii and Oba), Nok sites and Stone Age sites like ropp rock shelter-pingell and Benue. Monuments including buildings of archaeological and historical interests, cemeteries or ancient city walls also attract tourists.

Religious centers constitute major tourism attractions in the world up till the modern time, and this potential has continued to grow from strength to strength. Every year, multitudes of Christians embark on pilgrimage tour to places like Jerusalem, Rome, Canterbury and Israel while the Muslims travel to Mecca for the same purpose. Apart from these big religious centres, people who practice traditional religion troupe to many local shrines and sanctuaries scattered all over the country. Popular shrines include Oshun shrine in Oshogbo, Long-Juju of Arochukwu, Okija and Awkuzu shrines etc. As for museums, constitute the storehouse for cultural objects, they serve to collect, preserve and display both natural and cultural objects of antiquity or artistic value.

People travel from distant places to visit museums for various purposes, either for adventure or for sight-seeing. In this way, it serves to boost tourism development.

Cultural Resources are Informational in Nature

Many archaeological researches carried out in different parts of the country have led to the discernment of information about architectural designs, building materials and the general life pattern of our ancestors. Such pieces of information could be helpful, for rural and town infrastructural building. According to Derefaka, 1988, "The artifacts from archaeological excavations can help to fortify a deep sense of history and provide hope for the future". Most of the archaeological discoveries in Nok showed that they were among the early centers for the development of sophisticated cultural traditions in sub-Saharan Africa.

Challenges of Cultural Resource Preservation
-   Misrepresentation and Misconception

The early colonialists along with foreign writers and critics, through their imperial arrogance, accused Africans of being primitive, idolatrous, savage and evil. Initially, the castigation originated from the navigators and travelers who came to Africa in search of trade - Portuguese exploration of the Guinea coast (Ekechukwu, 2007). This was followed by the political adventurers and missionaries and much later, the Europeans writers. They branded Africa as a dark continent and a "people without a God, law or religion" (Killam, 1968). Unfortunately, our forefathers succumbed to this idea of Africa's inferiority as propagated by the Europeans, though under duress and started disregarding traditional religion and all objects of traditional worship. Their myths, belief system and ways of life became altered, eroded and misrepresented in varying degrees owing to the influence of the Westerners and other ethnocentric forces. It is worthy to mention at this point that the survivors of the colonial vandalization, were silently and forcibly exported to Europe and America as spoils of war (Ekechukwu, 2007).

-   Effect of "New Religion"

The colonialists came with Christian religion which was also forcefully introduced, while they eradicated the practice of traditional religion. The impact was so tremendous. The religious iconoclasts profaned the sacred objects of worship and massively destroyed them. Some decades ago, this attitude was openly exhibited by the Pentecostal churches that destroyed many shrines in the rural communities. Today,

this "canker worm" has eaten deep into the young catholic priests who organize prayers in the rural villages and destroy objects like monuments, shrines and even some economic trees of significance under the guise of pursuing evil spirits and eradicating fetishism. This condition of fanaticism has brought a lot of resentment for traditional practices among the Igbo people of Nigeria. A lot of traditional festivals, dances, masquerades, drums, traditional music and musical instruments have fallen victim of this development and have fizzled away due to lack of care or patronage. According to Agulana (2008), "Many of the carved gods (*Agbara*) condemned as irreligious and a challenge to God Almighty found their way into the museums in Europe". There, our illustrious sons pay foreign exchange to view the so called devilish gods.

- **Careless Handling of Cultural Objects**

Apart from the manifestations of colonial imperialism, the survivors from the massive destruction and exportation were still exposed to lots of hazards. The reason is not far fetched: it is either that the immediate custodians who valued and reverenced the objects are dead or that the objects are abandoned as a result of indoctrination. Consequently, some of these objects fell victim of theft. There is a new wave of smuggling in antiquities which is fast becoming one of the safest money-spinning ventures in the world today. Therefore, most of the stolen objects are smuggled to the western countries where they attract millions of dollars. Some are also recklessly dumped where they are either attacked by weather or destroyed by termites.

Suggestions for Proper Management

Earlier in this paper, the museum has been distinguished as a storehouse for both archaeological and ethnographic resources. There also exist archaeological sites and monuments. Therefore, an effective management of cultural resources will seek to delimit them into cultural areas (Okpoko and Okpoko, 2002). The aim is to fashion out the suitable management strategy that is sensitive to each area. The plan for the management of archaeological sites will require clearing and maintenance of roads leading to the sites as measures to make the place more aesthetic, and to evoke tourist visits. On the other hand, for cultural properties in the museum, priority may be placed on the provision of infrastructural facilities, employing and training experts for the successful running of the establishments, among other needs. Monuments like old city boundary walls my require roofing to prevent easy weakening and destruction by weather. As Ekechukwu (2007)

averred, effective management of sites, must consider the following critical factors:
- The fragility of cultural and natural sites/ landscapes.
- Recognition of local interest
- Contribution to the local and natural economies.
- Acceptance of participation from all sectors, levels/stakeholders
- Creation of appropriate planning and management mechanisms
- Diversification of opportunities and forms of tourism
- Reduction of tourism's environmental impact
- Adoption of codes of conduct by the tourism industry

Eboreime (2004), holds the view that effective management of heritage places involves the following levels of operation:

- Location, identification and documentation of the cultural resources within a defined area of land
- Assessment of the value and significance of the place to the community, national usefulness and global implications
- Planning and decision making
- Implementation involving conservation, marketing, interpretation, use management and educational programming.

He added that conservation management plans must be communicated to all the stakeholders, who must work together as a team.

Responsibilities for Management of Cultural Resources

The government occupies a crucial position in the management of the cultural resources of any nation, Nigeria inclusive. It is the government's responsibility to assess the validity of the cultural resources, document and fund the development, create awareness, enact favourable policies, provide conducive environment and employ experts to manage the properties. These functions are executed in Nigeria through the national trustee that is "The National Commission for Museums and Monuments".

Once a cultural property is evaluated and confirmed to be of importance, it must be listed and given legal protection by the local authority. For instance, a local government can enact a by-law through community consent, which can form the basis for a state edict and later a national legislation. Depending on the volume of acquisition and interest, the local government may wish to develop the cultural properties into community museums or adult education/ craft development centres, thereby providing employment within the context of a living cultural

system. While emphasizing on the need for proper documentation, Ekechukwu suggested the need to open National Registers which must be comprehensive, detailed and descriptive and emphasized that the information given about any item/ site must contain the following:

- Name of item; Site
- Geographic origin
- Location
- Condition of the object/ place/ site
- Usefulness (function)
- Age as at the date of recording
- Material of which the object is made
- Nature of the object/place
- Condition/state of the object/place
- History of object/ place
- Number in the Register
- Custodian
- Publication, reproduction and catalogues where they have featured among other needed information.

According to Arinze in Andah (2007), the paucity of information in the documentation of cultural resources was noticed as early as 1897 after the fall of the great Benin Empire. It was only then that it became obvious that no document showed which objects were there in the palace, their number before the episode or even the type of records kept about them. The issue of poor documentation rendered a lot of early studies and researches by anthropologists unauthentic and since then, the need for the National Register of all historic properties have been emphasized. Indeed, an attempt in this direction was made in 1974 together with the promulgation of Decree No. 9, known as the antiquities (prohibited Transfers) degree 1974. Up till date, the enforcement of the decree has remained a problem. Registration has not been continuing at an appreciable rate (for recent discoveries) and the awareness is not there, especially in the rural localities of Nigeria. Furthermore, there are no collaborative efforts among the stakeholders seconded by lack of communication with similar agencies across the globe. This contact would have served to provide updates in information, as well as advancements in techniques.

Indigenous private/charitable organizations should also make contributions through funding, to the preservation and development of sites and monuments in Nigeria. They can provide finance or facilities towards the conservation of cultural properties.

Traditional Rulers, Family Heads and Elders in the communities and villages, who are in custody of some of the cultural properties, must help to create awareness on the need for preservation and protection. There is need to enact and enforce traditional laws to prohibit careless handling of the cultural objects in their possession. Some of the archeological sites, shrines and monuments are bushy and unkempt. Traditional rulers can demonstrate their ownership of these properties by cleaning the surrounding bushes and maintaining the connecting roads.

Conclusion

Government at all levels – Federal, State and Local Governments are vested with the responsibilities to provide for the effective management of the nation's cultural resources. The inability of the government to liaise with other stakeholders – recognized bodies of heritage managers, traditional leaders, town planners and architects - is an impediment to this task and must be resolved. Working as a team through collaborative effort in the preservation and transformation of the properties is still farfetched, and until this improves, the derivable economic, social and intellectual benefits accruing to the nation's wealth of cultural resources may not be enjoyed.

Recommendations

- The local communities should be more committed as stakeholders in the management of cultural resources which are mostly domiciled in the rural areas.
- There is need for collaborative effort between the government and other stakeholders, namely the recognized bodies of heritage managers, town planners, town leaders and others
- Government should improve the funding and also review the policies guiding heritage resources management to fast track development.

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