National Development in Cultural Perspective: the Example of Africa

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Introduction

The question of how nations develop and the various factors associated with their development has been an issue of interest to scholars from the distant past. In those early days, the belief was that the spirits or the gods directed and changed the course of development of man in relation to his pattern of life, culture and his surrounding environment. During the medieval time, the period when the church ruled the known civilized world, development was viewed from a purely religious dimension. That was the period when the church denounced all forms of scientific investigation and discouraged church members from engaging in any such activity. Nevertheless, this state of affairs did not last for a long time following the resurgent interest in scientific inquiries of the renaissance world (Ngwoke and Eze 2010).

Development and economic growth are synonymous with progress and high level of civilization. Growth is seen as a natural process, which can be nourished through the application of correct and timely inputs. However, development is a product of effective utilization of both material and non-material aspects of human life within the framework of available cultural and natural resources (Mowang, 2001). It is noteworthy that the role of culture in development has been relegated in most parts of the world especially in the so called "developed" cultures. This has led to the undermining of the unique cultures of those of the 'under developed' and 'developing' countries which should serve as key drivers of development. Thanks to the concept and philosophy of sustainable development, that recognizes both cultural and natural processes of development.

This paper, therefore, seeks to discuss the concept of culture and development. It begins with the concept of culture and development, theories of development, relationship between culture and development and the role that culture can play in national development. It tries to find solutions to such questions as: "is culture and development related?", "can

culture (African culture) play any role in development?", "if yes, how effective has it been in the development of African nations?"

Culture and Development: A Definition

The concept of culture has been defined in a number of different but related ways. Tylor (1871) defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Again, culture has, in general parlance, been viewed as the finer things in life like good taste, refinement, appreciation of good music, literature etc. (McGee, 1980). It is the totality of what is learned by individuals as members of a society (Nwanunobi *et al* 2004). Culture is also anything that human beings do that does not have a biological basis. In short, McGee defines culture as "any piece or pattern of behaviour, attitude, value belief, or skills that people learn as members of human group, plus the manipulation of any material item derived from these abilities" (McGee 1980). Culture has also been defined as the way of life of a certain group of people in a particular society. Based on the above, Ifeyinwa (2004) highlighted examples of cultural groups using the nomadic Fulani, who possess similarities in language. According to her, culture depicts glaring similarities between people within the same territorial space that foster a feeling of oneness for future generations. Shoremi (1999) also defines culture as "a set of techniques for adjusting both to external environment and to other men…cultures produce needs as well as provide a means of fulfilling them". Andah (1982) sees culture as:

> That which embraces all the material and non material expressions of a people as well as the processes with which the expressions are communicated. It has to do with all the social, ethical, intellectual, scientific, artistic, and technological expressions and proccesses of a people usually ethnically and/or normally or supra-nationally related, and usually living in a geographically continuous area; what they pass on to their successors and how these are passed on". (Andah 1982, in Ifeyinwa, 2004).

Culture is the sum total of the beliefs, knowledge, attitudes of mind and customs to which a person is exposed during his social conditioning (Okpoko, 2010). It is the totality of a people's way of life as deduced from material and non material aspects of their life such as clothing, values, beliefs, thoughts, feelings and customs. This includes traits imbibed by all healthy individuals in the course of growing in a specific society (Ukeje, 1992). Two components of culture have been delineated as follows: material and non material culture. Material culture refers to physical objects that can be seen or touched; that is, anything that human beings use or make like buildings, cloths, farming implements etc. On the other hand, non-material culture includes norms, values, beliefs, language, music etc. Okeke, *et. al*. (2003) highlighted seven characteristics of culture as follows:

- Culture is shared in social interaction with other members of the group. In other words, culture makes sense only in reference to groups of people;
- Culture is learned through interaction with others,
- Culture is cumulative,
- Culture is adaptive,
- Culture is a system,
- Culture is universal- found in every human society, and
- Culture is dynamic.

Every society possesses a culture that defines required modes of thinking, acting and feeling. One would not be out of place to say that man is definitely nothing without culture as it unconsciously shapes his life. Thus, Dabaghian (1970) stressed that the price of any society lies in its culture since no society in the world could be considered great without reference to its tradition and culture.

On its parts, development as a concept has taken on many meanings. It has a range of defining characteristics from narrowly delineated economic ones through broader social values to mere general attributes such as self reliance. Goulete (1968) has pointed out that although development has usually been treated as a process of social change, it is also a state or condition. Hence, when we talk of a developed country we refer to the country's present state or condition and this is usually assumed to be an economic one (Smith, 1977). Development suggests an evolutionary process with positive connotations and always of something particularly human beings, society, a nation, an economy, a skill etc (Okpoko and Okpoko 2002). According to them development is a process of change or a complex of such processes, which is in some degree lawful or at least sufficiently regular.

Onyekpe (2000) described development as a process of change using successive generations. He lamented that in the '60s, development was synonymous with economic growth which involves industrialization and modernization. In the '70s, the emphasis changed from economic growth to the provision of basic human needs, such as food, shelter, clothing and public services e.g. health care, sanitation, safe drinking water, education and transportation. In the'80s, the focus of development changed to rural development with targeted programs to reduce poverty through the innovative introduction and implementation of small-scale agricultural projects, community based enterprises and productive income generating activities for women. In the 1990s and 2000, the concept of sustainable development gained ground and connoted collective survival of both man's cultural heritage and his environment since man is both the agent and beneficiary of development (Onyekpe 2000).

For Esenjo (1992) development is self reliant growth achieved through the participation of the peoples' acting in their own interest as they see them, and under their own control. Its first control objective must be to end poverty, provide productive employment and satisfy the basic needs of all

the people, any surplus being fairly shared. This implies that the basic goods and services such as food and shelter, basic education and health facilities even clean water must be accessible to all. Besides, it means a system of justice, which protects all the people from action consistent with just laws that are known and publicly accepted. Development is associated with material advancement, modernization, industrialization, scientific and technological advancement, the emergence of nuclear energy; the electronic and biological revolution, and new knowledge about man and the universe amongst others (Ehizuelen 1996).

Five main features emerge from the above definitions:

- Development is a process of change,
- The change must be positive in nature,
- Development takes place in a place or on an object
- Development encompasses political, economic, social and the cultural environment of man, and
- Development arises from man's natural and cultural resources

Thus, a common contribution to the definition of development is that; development is a gradual and sequential phase of positive change, an upward course, which occurs in a society, nation, community or even in an individual and involving structural transformations, which implies political, economic, and social changes, emanating from man's cultural and natural milieu.

Theoretical anchor

In order to appreciate the concept of development, it is worthwhile to understand the theories of development. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, modernization and dependency theories are adjudged useful. Before we discuss these theories, it is pertinent to first of all know the meaning of theory. The term theory has been defined by Haralambos (1980) as "a set of ideas, which provides explanation for something". Kelinger (1973) sees a theory as "a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena". It is a logically interconnected set of propositions from which empirical uniformity will rise.

In 1963, Karl Marx defined a theory as 'a basis for research practice and application, which serves both as a tool and as a goal. As a tool theory serves to direct empirical investigation: the tool function is evident in the generally accepted proposition that theories guide research by generating new predictions not otherwise likely to occur. As a goal, theory is something valued in its own right i.e. theories integrate and order empirical findings; they are an economical and efficient means for abstracting, codifying summarizing, integrating and storing information (Marx 1963). Encarta Encyclopedia standard (2004) sees a theory as an assumption or set of assumptions, accepted principles, and rules of procedure based on limited

information or knowledge, devised to analyze, predict, or otherwise explain the nature or behaviour of a specified set of phenomena; abstract reasoning (Encarta 2004). Therefore the formulation of valid theories is very vital in the effort to promote and accelerate the expansion and development of human capabilities in any field, leading to fresh discoveries, improvement of existing activities and capacity for greater result.

Modernization theory

Modernization has been defined as 'the process by which an underdeveloped region changes in response to inputs (ideologies, behavioural codes, commodities and institutional model) from already established industrial centres …" (Schneider *et.al* 1972). Modernization theory consists of a variety of perspectives, namely economic, psychological and technological considerations. In spite of the varieties, modernization theories draw heavily from the "tradition-modernity" distinctions of the founding fathers of sociology that saw society from an evolutionary perspective. Society was said to have evolved from the theological to the positive or scientific stage (Auguste Comte); from the most simple to the most complex (Herbert Spencer); from mechanical to organic solidarity (Emile Durkheim); from Gemeinschaft to Gesselschaft (Toennies) and as Webster put it, with "traditional primitive values being displaced by modern ones" (Webster 1984). Everything "traditional" is seen as archaic, out of tune and unhelpful and to belong to the third World, while everything "modern" is the in-thing and said to belong to the west (Foster Carter 1986). Third world countries are therefore advised to do away with their traditional values and characteristics, which are seen as obstacles to development and embrace modern values, if they want to develop. As Nkom (1995) aptly summarized it:

> Modernization theory takes off from the premise that … underdevelopment derives essentially from the primitive, unproductive and change-resistant values, institutions and technologies found in "traditional" societies. These traditional and primitive ways of doing things are characterized by inefficiency, low productivity, and institutional inertia, which tend to act as obstacles to development …. The solution to this problem is assumed to lie in the adoption of modern technologies, institutions, managerial systems and ways of doing things.

The various strands of modernization theory believe that there are wide gaps between traditional and modern societies. These gaps are often so wide that they would require a total transformation of the social, educational, cultural, political and economic institutions of the underdeveloped countries for them to be able to close; or even reduce the gaps (Okpoko 2006).

Dependency theory

Dependency theory is sometimes referred to as 'Marxist theory' or underdevelopment theory'. Dependency theory is a set of theoretical explanations connecting the tendency of a national economy to rely on a foreign economy for growth and survival. It is a situation where a national economy is inextricably linked to and driven by a more advanced economy. The more advanced economy, more or less, dictates the major happenings in the local economy to suit their own whims and caprices. These are often executed through trade agreements and the injection of foreign capital and foreign technology. As Roxborough (1988) puts it:

> The mechanism by which value is transferred from periphery to center are manifold… direct plunder, through unequal exchange, through the exchange of productive goods, via a monopoly of shipping fleets, through control over prices, etc

In the above quotation the 'periphery' referred to the Third World while the center refers to the capitalist world. Dependency theory is simply saying that the underdeveloped countries are underdeveloped to the extent that they rely on the west economically, culturally, socially, militarily and technologically. For these countries to experience real development, they must necessarily delink or cut their ties with the west. As Griffin (1973) has argued:

> There are some international economic forces, which obviously tend to stimulate development but there are many other forces, which perpetuate inequalities and tend to retard development… The transfer of ideas, knowledge, factors of production and commodities may well increase, rather than decrease the obstacle to development.

Care should be taken to ensure that ideas, knowledge and commodities generated in the west and suitable for them are not swallowed in their entirety, without checking their presumed appropriateness for the Third World, including Nigeria.

The theory of dependency represents a framework within which various heterogeneous phenomena are analyzed to see how they link and interact with each other to form a total system. The theory must therefore be judged with reference to its adequacy or inadequacy as a framework for the articulation of the dynamics of certain relationships. In brief it is an attempt to establish a new paradigm (Mark, 2003). Obviously in unsophisticated hands the danger with total viewpoint is that dependency can easily become a pseudo-concept, which explains everything in general and hence, nothing in particular. The basic hypothesis of dependency theory is that development and underdevelopment are partial, interdependent structures of one global system. Dos Santos (1981) puts it as follows:

> Dependency is a conditioning situation in which the economies of one group of countries are conditioned by the development and expansion of others. A relationship of interdependence between two or more economies or between

> such economies and the world trading system becomes a dependent self impulsion while others being in a dependent position can only expand as a reflection of that which have positive or negative effects on their immediate environment

Sunkel (1980) puts the same point in very similar language; "development is a global, structural process of change and underdeveloped countries are those countries, which lack an autonomous capacity for change and growth and are dependent for these on the center". Thus, the objectives, intensity, instruments and efficiency of development policies are limited within certain margins of flexibility. Futado (1982) also emphasizes the necessity to begin with the structure of the world economy as a totality within which underdeveloped countries are sub-systems, and so the theory of underdevelopment turns out to be essentially a theory of dependence. Cardos (1988) maintained that development and underdevelopment are not different stages or states of a productive system, but rather are functions or positions within an international system of distribution and production.

Culture and Development: The Nexus

One of the characteristics of culture is its dynamism. This means that culture changes by accepting new items borrowed from neighbours or by the improvement of old items through invention or when some items of culture are rejected /abandoned or replaced by ones more suitable to the given environment, and when it is not possible to transmit items from one generation to another. The defeat of a cultural area, colonialism, imposition of alien religion, beliefs and ideas may also have this effect. Based on the above assertion, one can say that culture and development are related, since development also has to do with change. However, for a better understanding of the relationship between culture and development, the need to examine the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organizations' (UNESCO) stance on the issue as identified by Ifeyinwa (2004) is necessary.

From the beginning, UNESCO has emphasized the link between culture and development. Its mission of advancing through the educational, scientific and cultural relations of the people of the world, the objectives of peace and the common welfare of mankind is a bold step towards enhancing culture and development relationship. Culture as adopted in the development model, gained ground in the 1960s during the post colonial era with glaring differences to cultural diversity. Ifeyinwa (2004) observed that, "the liberated people had become aware of mode of existence and persistently challenged the notion that modernization had to mean westernization rather than being based on their own tradition". In response to the above, the UNESCO General Conference in Article 1 of the 1966 Declaration, states that "culture has a dignity and value which must be respected and preserved", "every people have the right and the duty to develop its culture" (Ifeyinwa, 2004).

- The introduction of culture to the heart of policy making agenda was spearheaded in 1970 at the Intergovernmental Conference on the Administrative and Financial Aspects of Cultural Policies. The quality of this summit was reflected in UNESCO Director General's message to the world, which states that:

> Man is the means and the end of development; he is not the one dimensional abstraction of homo economicus, but a living reality a human person, his potentials and his aspirations…in the concept of development the centre of gravity has thus shifted from the economic to the social, and we have reached a point where this shift begins to approach the cultural.

Again to appraise the objective of making cultural factors the focal point of all development strategies, the World Decade for Cultural Development was initiated and spanned through ten years (1988-1997). UNESCO came out with four important objectives within this period:

- Acknowledging the cultural dimension of development
- Affirming and enriching cultural identities
- Broadening participation in cultural life
- Promoting international cultural cooperation.

During this period, several projects were launched in almost all the countries of the world. And the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development recently came up with an action plan on cultural policies for development and identified some crucial principles for development. It is a truism that mans' development is fulfilled when he is socially and culturally mobilized.

How is Culture a tool for development?

One may be right to say that any development project that fails to recognize the culture of the people may not be successful. This is because every society possesses a culture that defines required modes of thinking, acting and feeling. Thus the existing cultural patterns of the people will determine whether and to what extent that society accepts or rejects incoming development. Culture serves as a bench mark to which the growth rate of societal development is assessed, that is whether the society is developing slowly or rapidly. African cultural heritage is seen as the basic spring board for genuine development since it conditions the entire social structure by serving as the main system that keeps the society together. Thus, the rich cultural heritage and artistic creativity of the African peoples exemplified in the magnificent monuments of the Great Zimbabwe, the Nok terracotta figures and the Cross River Monoliths of Nigeria, for instance could provide a source of international reputation and respect for African nations (Okpoko and Ezeadichie 2002). It is worthy to say here that, African traditional arts and crafts are vital sources of learning.

Culture helps in developing skills, abilities, and resourcefulness of the human person that can be translated into economic output, that is, inventive and innovative capabilities which are always invariably inspired and

supplemented by previous achievements usually referred to as tradition. Thus, Afigbo (1985) in Okpoko (2010) pointed out that "each master piece of art embodies both the genius of the group that produced it and the impact of the neighbours with whom it was in contact through trade, marriage, diplomatic relations or even war." In support of this assertion, Isamah (1996) observed that "numerous studies of anthropologists have shown that the traditional values of a people are closely related to the pace with which such people accept or reject the demand of modern industrial or commercial operation." Looking at African indigenous technology, Andah (1988) as cited in Okpoko (2010) revealed that: controlled experiments in primitive (early) agricultural methods (land use and crop cultivation methods); ancient architectural styles and raw materials can probably indicate where such methods can with refinement be more usefully employed than the imported modern methods, tested and found to work in areas very different from here (Africa).

It is also believed that African traditional medicine can supplement and even be better in most cases than modern medicare services if properly studied, understood and managed. The promotion of traditional roots and herbs that are capable of curing different kinds of diseases in the western part of Nigeria is a welcome development. Culture helps in evolving useful values and institutions which help to organize society and ensure its stability and development. With it, there is the ability to plan, forecast and manage development on the basis of knowledge acquired through the systematic study of any given society.

In multi-ethnic nations like Nigeria, understanding of culture could serve as a medium through which people can appreciate the existence of cultural diversity among groups. Awareness and respect for the cultural traits of each diverse component within the state could foster integrated national unity. Barriers that separate human groups both culturally and naturally such as language, geographical landmarks and historical antecedents, can be removed through exchange of ideas and interaction among ethnic groups and between nations and within a nation. Through such interactions, the cultural material through which man's past artistic and scientific innovations are embodied could be treasured and appreciated. This in turn could help in promoting a sense of national pride and respect among the various groups within the nation.

In Africa the promotion of cultural tourism and eco-tourism present opportunities for deriving adequate monetary benefits from the conservation of cultural resources. The Nigerian cultural heritage, which is embedded in the prehistory, contemporary practices and future expectations of the people, can be the foundation for tourism and economic development (Alagoa, 1988). Eco-tourism in practice integrates conservation with the travel industry by promoting the incorporation of both the ecological and the cultural landscape with economic development (Rizzo1992, Klamer 1996, Alagoa 1988, Boo 1991 in Okpoko 2010).

Cultural tourism could also be of immense value to African nations if the cultural potentials of the continent are fully exploited. The conservation and advertisement of archaeological, ethnographic and sacred historic sites as centers of cultural excellence, backed by the provision of adequate infrastructural facilities within these sites to make them appealing to visitors are quite necessary. Through the establishment of museums the very best of African creative ingenuity could be propagated while also realizing monetary gains from payments from both local and international visitors. Also African festivals which are characterized by good music, drama, songs, dances and colourful masquerade displays, apart from their entertainment and recreational benefits can stimulate the local economy of the rural folk who participate in such activities (Okpoko 2010). Having appreciated culture as a tool for development, the question now is, is African culture really playing its developmental role?

In an attempt to answer this question, Ifeyinwa (2004) queried thus: "at the end of the colonial period and the acquisition of political independence, what do we as Africans have to show for this period of forced bondage? Nothing!" "Nothing but an inability to govern ourselves, resuscitate or protect those cultural values that were laid to sleep during the colonial period." Like the colonial era when Africans were made to learn colonial culture and to study the histories of Europe and not their own, African leaders of today prefer western culture to their own. Thus, a critical assessment of development in most aspects of African culture reveals the dilemma of a people whose culture has been trampled upon by both foreigners and their own leaders (Okpoko, 2010).

During the pre-colonial period, life in the African traditional setting was never without a feeling of oneness. This was promoted because they were existing laws, family values and community assistance schemes that ensured that the helpless are never left despondent. In the urban setting where the western culture is deep seated, man is alone, only responsible to his immediate family, not minding his moral and cultural values. And because of the abandonment of our rich culture evident in the mode of dressing, respect for parents and elders, doors are ajar for negative urban traits of crime, unemployment, alcoholism, divorce and debauchery (Ifeyinwa, 2004). The issue of development in Africa is a mirage, since up till this time; we are still weighed down by ignorance, insufficient exposure and incompetent leadership. We are in a world where we are born free yet find it so difficult to express that which is the soul of our existence- that which categorizes us as belonging to a certain race, colour or language unit (Ifeyinwa, 2004).

Economic growth and socio-political progress in Africa since the achievement of self rule has been equated with structural improvements in basic infrastructure. No attention is given to cultural revitalization. Yet the daily invisible role of culture in determining our customs, values, moral and growth in the society cannot be over emphasized. However, if Africans must graduate from the so called "underdeveloped" or "third world", there is the

need to moderate the deep seated western culture glaring in our dressing, music, dance, language, artwork, food, attitude to innovations and seek for that which made us Africans before the coming of the white man.

To effectively utilize the potential of culture in the development of African nations, we should:

- Desist from western ideas and way of life and design our own compatible developmental ideals that will be African culture-oriented.
- Commission professionals in the area of conservation of our heritage to present an inventory of our works of art, art forms, folk history or oral tradition and practice.
- Develop strategic and excellent measures to promote African culture through cultural tourism.
- Promote a general African language.

In consonance with the forgone, Okpoko (2010) also pointed out that for Africans to come out of the shackles of underdevelopment, there is an urgent need to re-order their developmental ideals and concepts, in order to explore the usefulness of such indigenous cultural institutions as kinship and family, creative and artistic techniques, justice and discipline, traditional architecture and settlement patterns, technology as well as land use methods, among others.

Conclusion

People interact with each other and with their surroundings in a variety of ways. The framework within which this interaction occurs is provided by their culture- their shared beliefs, values, languages, traditions, and so on, that constitute their daily lives. By extension, culture has appeared as the center-stage, as the focus of the new development concept. Therefore, a leadership interested in the technological, political and economic advancement or development of its nation should never disregard the role of culture.

A search for and safeguarding of our culture is the starting point of any meaningful attempt at African cultural freedom and development. An African development that should begin with an identification of Africa's condition as well as solutions for correcting these conditions formulated by Africans for Africans is imperative. Thus, Africans should learn to do things targeted at their awakening so that the visible challenges hampering their development can be eradicated.

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