

Accessing The Role of Local Culture in Community Development

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Abstract: Culture is communication and value shared. It involves symbols, heroes and rituals and more importantly values and norms that can shape people's lives towards their own development and the development of communities. Culture which can be referred to as the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values and attitudes has not always been really appreciated and acknowledged as playing any meaningful role in the process of community development. This paper examined what role culture is expected to play in the development of individuals and communities. In its role in community development, local cultures contributes to building a sense of local identity and solidarity, thereby, serving as a viable tool in shaping the effectiveness of development options in communities. The paper found among others that cultural life is among the most important factors determining the satisfaction of the life of the people and that people value social relationships which is fostered by the culture of the people, which builds up into personal and community development. It was also found that culture would awaken creativity, which leads to economic buoyancy of individuals and communities. Engaging local culture for development would enhance mobilization of people towards participation in community development and this will influence quality of life, welfare of the community members and sustainability of communities. It is recommended that leaders of community should mobilize people for cultural engagements and government should include activities in curriculum of schools

Keyword: culture, community, development, community development, power culture, participation

I. INTRODUCTION

Local culture provides a sense of identity for the development of communities both rural and urban because culture is not geographic bound. Every community has its own cultural heritage, however, many of the Nigerian cultures are being abandoned for some foreign cultures which are of no benefit in propagating the development of communities in Nigeria. Valuables are being dropped for triviality hence, many young and old people do not see any impact being made by culture on both personal and community development. When a cultural basis is provided for development efforts, people will participate and remain committed to such development efforts.

Development efforts that focus on culture provide a mechanism for linking community members to development process. (Adedokun,2020) Local culture, therefore, encourages, preserves and promotes local participation, volunteerism and community action. To understand the place of culture in development process, consideration must be given to the social basis of culture, its relationship to interaction and the types of development and local actions in community development.

(Adedokun,2020) The culture includes yam festivals, masquerading festivals, carnivals through which people are mobilized for development.

The essence of community development is to enhance the capacity of communities to positively improve their socio economic conditions and their standards of living to which they must participate actively through effective mobilization. The culture of a group of people remains a strong factor in mobilizing people towards the process of community development.

Culture

Culture has not been dealt with in relation to community development by many authors. They have not delve into the issue of culture as playing any significant role in development of communities. Anyanwu (1992) sees community as a place where people live and develop an awareness of common sentiments based on common way of life, guarding their rules and regulations jealously in order to bring peace and development to the community. This definition leans towards upholding cultural values in the community to foster development. Adejuyigbe (1970) in Adedokun (2020) also sees community as a social unit made up of people brought together by some common affinities that are characterized by primary, personal, informal, secondary, impersonal or formal relationships depending on the simplicity or otherwise of the community. Viewing community in this way, culture has a lot of roles to play in communities because every community is marked by some degrees of social coherence with local sentiment which is cultural in orientation. These local sentiments that brings about coherence amounts to putting the culture of the people in its rightful place in matters of development.

Culture has been defined in various ways by various authors and people. Culture is simply defined as the entire way of life of a group of people such as their values, norms, rules and regulations and their standard of behavior (Adedokun,2020).

William (2004) believes that local culture is indispensable to community development because culture deals with ways of life of the people and power culture in each territory and community as they hinder or enhance development. The import here is that as good as local culture is in issues of development, when interspersed with power culture (which is also an aspect of culture) in an unfavourable way, it could hinder development but when put to good use, development is enhanced. He further explains that viewing culture as either enhancing development

or being a constraint to local development depends on the ways in which ethnic, gender, race and other cultural identities impact on people's capacity to change their lives and communities.

Power culture is a very important aspect of culture in relation to community development because community development is a democratic process in which every community member must participate in their social, economic, cultural and political issues. However, in a situation where leaders carry and invest power in themselves, even though cultural norms and values are well respected by members of community, participation in community development will be difficult. Thus, autocratic leadership does not give way for effective practice of culture in ways that will lead to development. When power is invested in an individual or particular groups of people at the expense of community members, it may lead to misuse of powers leading to situations where some members wield their powers and privileges and other community members are denied the rights and access to taking part in development process as they lack access to community resources and their voices are kept to the background.

Adekola, (2005) perceives that when community development is approached from the cultural point of view, all areas of development will be touched as culture deals with the totality of the lives of the people. Through the use of people's culture, community development approach to solving problems in the community will eventually ensue as the strength of this approach has the ability not only to carry people along in projects of development but also the strength to educate, sensitize and conscientize them with the aim of encouraging them to participate in development programmes that are meant to raise their standards of living.

The study of William (2004) titled 'Culture and community development: Towards new conceptualization and practice' carried out in New Zealand revealed that while some participants are lethargic towards the issue of culture, some believe that there is need for broadening social outlook on culture, that there is need for development of social practices within communities in ways that innovations will be interjected into traditional cultures. It was stated that Pacific culture is too hierarchical and does not give room for development of self-autonomy in terms of authority. This view portrays autocracy and top-down approach to development that could hinder people's effective participation in community development. Exposure to new culture is therefore of utmost importance to build new knowledge that can be harnessed to local culture for better community development practices.

The author submits that exposure to new world views and participation in social practices would be of great effect in making use of local culture for development. While being exposed and interacting with cultures of the world, the local culture should not be neglected but integrated with the new world view of culture. This calls for making use of culture to bring about leadership that is not myopic in view but one that will instill confidence in people, help them to air their views

during community gatherings. The qualities observed in people during cultural processed can make a person to become a good community leader for community development programmes. This new world view is in opposition to traditional community meetings where people only listen without their views or opinions heard let alone of being given consideration. Exposure to new cultures will awaken the potentialities of the people, learn new ways of expressions and new ways of being. Exposure to cultural systems that are dynamic and susceptible to change will empower the community members as they are given the chance to express themselves as culture is a medium of expression, just as culture in one of its varied definition states that culture is communication and communication is the core of community development through which people are mobilized to participate in development efforts.

Harrison, Huntington & Samuel (2000) express that there is need for conscious decision making regarding cultural maintenance, exchange and integration of elements of other cultures that are likely to strengthen empowerment. They are of the opinion that there is tendency to resist cultural change in terms of feelings of power and powerlessness among members. For community development to foster, every member must have a say in decision making that will empower them to take active part in development related matters while at the same time making everyone to see the good in other cultures and through cultural diffusion make use of such in developing their community. Decision making is another core aspect of community development to which everyone must be given a chance to talk.

Tjarve & Zemite (2016) in their study titled "The role of cultural activities in community development" submit that culture has a critical role in transforming localities into more attractive places where people can invest. They state that cultural activities and facilities significantly affect the physical environment of communities. The aim of their study was to evaluate participation effect of Riga's neighbourhood during the year of the European capital Cuba making use of qualitative interviews to elicit responses from participants. Among the findings of their study was that cultural life in the neighbourhood is among the most important factors determining the satisfaction of life by the people, that personalities not infrastructure have a crucial importance in the development of neighbourhood life. They also submit that cultural activities should be carried out in close cooperation with stakeholders from different sectors in order to bring long lasting sustainable effect. They express that cultural activities would broaden the understanding of culture and would involve local inhabitants in order to sharpen their creativity in the line of development. This implies that cultural development and creative activities are germane in influencing the quality of life and welfare of community members and sustainability of communities.

Majuere (2017) in the study titled "The application of Riga for the title of the European culture" submits that people value relationship and that cultural activities contribute to the creation of engaging places for residence, business and leisure

activities. The finding of this study reveal that bottom –up cultural practices permeate through all levels of society and that cultural activities generate creativity in interaction with other forms of innovation and processes to achieve scientific, technical and commercial results. Culture should, therefore, not be neglected based on its importance in bringing about growth to individuals and communities.

Some of the local festivals in Nigeria communities that encourage hard work, good values and attaining excellence in communities with the hope of contributing to the financial and moral status of communities are: new year festival, masquerade festivals, fishing festivals and others as practiced in various communities. Through these festivals, funds are raised and people are mobilized for development issues. These festivals also highlight the importance of rural cultures and through them, community identities are reinforced and collective identities and interactions are heightened leading to better community relationship that fosters development.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE

There are many definitions of culture by various authors and people and from which great values are learnt for personal and community development. The following are some of the characteristics.

- a. Culture is the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience beliefs and values, attitudes, meanings, religion, concepts of the universe and material objectives and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations though individual and group strivings (tamu.edu).
- b. Culture is communication without which no information about heroes and their heroic deeds are passed down from which future generations could learn, emulate and put into action good acts while disannulling bad examples.
- c. The core of culture is formed by values. Values can be inferred from the way people act under different situations. It may be good-evil, right -wrong.
- d. Culture could be rituals used to reach desired objectives. It could be in form of paying respect to living and dead heroes; it could be religious or social ceremonies which draw people together for the purpose of development of characters that will aid development
- e. Culture is a way of life of the people that are passed down through communication and imitation from one generation to the next. (Ogunbiyi,1995)

The above reveal that culture is the sum total of learned behavior of a group of people that is considered to be their worthwhile traditions. However, no matter how good a culture is, there is always something new to learn from other cultures through intermingling and such can be useful in the process of community development.

III. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community development is a combination of two word, “community and development”. The word community simply means a group of people living in the same geographic area, having rules, regulations, norms and values to guide their ways of behavior to the extent that they are able to participate actively in their communities, socially, economically, culturally and politically. It is a place where they have their being. Social interaction that leads to participation in community issues is made possible through effective communication and democratic principles that allow each person to be seen and heard (Adedokun,2020). In relation to community, development means positive growth in people, a positive change in the psychological, physical and emotions of the people that will help them, to uphold development tendencies through the awakening of their dormant potentials while dropping lethargic attitudes to issue of development.

Community development is a grassroots process by which communities become more responsible and responsive, organized and plan together to develop healthy lifestyles, empower themselves, reduce poverty and suffering and create employment and economic opportunities to achieve social, cultural and environmental goals. Community seeks to improve quality of life. Effective communication development results in mutual benefits and shared responsibilities among community members. Such development recognizes the connection between social, cultural, economic and environmental matters. Culture which is a way of life of the people can, therefore, not be separated from community development. People are at the centre of both culture and community development. (Egenti 2005)

Flora, Flora & Swamson (1992) are of the opinion that people must work together to make a difference in order to address their needs in a collective way. Culture can help in this process as culture is described as a system of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people. In cultural activities like heroes are celebrated and knowledge of how they developed their communities could be learned. These activities could serve as a mobilizing and encouraging force to move communities forward towards development in a collective way.

Related to the above view is the definition of Christenson & Robinson (1989) that community development is a group of people in a community reaching a decision to initiate social action process to change their economic, social, cultural and environmental situations. Change of cultural situation does not mean neglect of local culture but broadening their world view to accepting cultures that could bring about better development.

Culture as a way of life of people would help in discovering the failures and successes recorded in the past and make the present generations look ahead future endeavours in a way that will ensure success.

As in the case of culture, community development also helps to:

- Develop responsible leadership among the people

- Inculcate in people the spirit of citizenship and civic consciousness
- Encourages and strengthens democracy at the grassroots level
- Fosters unity and cooperative attitudes among the people of the community
- It is a means of solving local problems besetting the people just as culture could be used to solve difficult problems besetting people in their communities.

In terms of scope, community development is as wide as the scope of life itself, hence community development as culture is not geographic bound, it takes place everywhere people live and making use of local culture for development issues would mean turning down the top-down approach to local development and making power available to all. This is in support of Adedokun (2011) in Borode, (2011), that participation means the building up of influence or involvement from the bottom upwards. The scope of community development as in culture is very involving since the two take cognizance of wide people participation. Adedokun in Borode, quoting Reid (2009) reiterates that elements of community participation include, many people, people centered and that power and responsibilities are to be decentralized in the community, that is power structure should be dealt with in way that allows everyone to participate; and that community development is open and advertised just as culture is. As community development is open to all, so also is culture. The two have their ingredient as inclusiveness. There is no distinction drawn among groups and types of personalities that offer themselves for community involvement and cultural activities. Everyone is welcome to take active part in culture and community development regardless of their level of education, occupation, reputation, handicap, language appearance or religion. Community participation in development as well as in culture is an open process where leadership is not used to intimidate any member of the community. In both activities, leaders are not ego driven but are focuses in operating a high quality, open decision making process. Empowerment of community members is thus the true end of participating in culture and community development and this will end in development projects that are sustainable (Rakodi,1991, Friedman, 1996).

Community in its scope covers educational programmes such as enlightenment and citizenship training which will enable people to do the right thing at the right time and learn from historic past, hold on to success stories and lean on the values and norms of community for development purpose. The core of culture is also found in moral values and norms for development of communities. The scope of community development also revolves around maintenance culture that will help community maintain and sustain projects of development. Ajibola (2009) in Adedokun (2011) submits that on personal level people must imbibe maintenance culture in order to enjoy the best of life stating that how well we use our personal and public physical assets is dependent on how well people have imbibed the culture of maintenance, this is to

buttress the view of culture as the total way of life of a group of people.

In the study of Adedokun (2011) on maintenance culture, she found that there is a significant relationship between maintenance culture and community development ($\chi^2_{cal} = 108.351 > \chi^2_{tab} = 24.996$ at 0.05 level of significance). This reflects the fact that as community development is involving and embracing so also is culture. Community development covers economic activities such as culture does. Community development can be used to mobilize people into forming cooperative societies to engage in large farming and trading activities that will be profitable for community people and their development. Market stalls and community centers where skills are learnt are build in communities to enhance the economic purposes of the people and thereby, retain people in their local environment thereby, mitigating rural urban migration.

Culture has its own side of economic enhancement. cultural preservation of efforts focusing solely on economy can be observed in relation to tourism and conservation efforts like renovation of villages, restoring historic sites to serve as a focal point for tourists, cultural venues, local heritage centres, traditional cultural events, traditional crafts and artistic skills and employment based on production of items which are symbolic of local culture. All these are cultural industry capable of boosting the finances of communities and members towards development. Others are cultural based entertainment, organization of cultural activities and exhibitions of various kinds

Community development and culture through their broad programmes are means of integrating individuals and communities into global events both culturally and developmentally; to bring about not only self attainment but community and national development (Adedokun,2011).

The bottom line for community development and culture is that both are life- long events.

IV. ROLES OF CULTURE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The under listed can be deduced from the reviews made on culture as contributions to community development.

- a. Culture which is perceived as the total way of life of a group of people including their values and standard of behavior can be described as shared products of communities
- b. Culture consists of ideas, rules, values, knowledge, experience and material dimension. These cultural values reflect ideals and visions of what society should be in terms of peace and development. Values often shape expected behaviours while community rules guide people on how to conduct themselves and act towards others. At the core of values and norms is a process of interaction that leads to community participation in community development.
- c. Culture serving as a focal point for community development can serve to promote local identity, local

- languages and minority culture to the extent that inclusiveness is achieved in the process of community development.
- d. Local culture as a fundamental component of community life shapes the unique character, needs and concerns of individuals in communities. Culture and attachment to it can thus be used as a motivating factor in promoting community development and this can serve as a tool for policy makers and other interested groups in encouraging development at the local level.
 - e. Culture can be perceived as representing both the means and ends of development. Therefore by emphasizing the wealth and diversity of people's cultural heritage, communities would be able to develop activities that enhance social and economic well being of their communities. (Adedokun,2020)
 - f. When community development is approached from the cultural point of view, all areas needing development will be touched bearing in mind that culture deals with the total way of life of people thus leading to the use of participatory approach for development.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above review, the following recommendations are made.

1. Community leaders should not play down the roles of culture in community development because both community leaders and members are products of the culture of the community.
 2. Conservative community leaders should make use of power in such a way that would lead to a change in their world view and thus, bringing about better change in local culture in an attempt to enhance community development.
 3. Policy makers and other stakeholders should advance the cause of culture in policy making so that local culture will be encouraged at all the tiers of government.
 4. The government at the federal, state and local levels in Nigeria should design and run programmes of cultural activities that will attract visitors and enhance of pride and confidence in the culture of the people.
5. The government should include in school curriculum studies on culture and its importance to national development and monitor its being run effectively in schools. Such curriculum should be developed and focused on artistic development, artists and local inhabitants and their local artistic activities.

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