

The Influence of Culture on African Development

By

Akinwumi, Olatunji Samuel

College Of Education, Ikere-Ekiti

Department Of Christian Religious Studies

E-MAIL: tunji.samakin@gmail.com

Phone No: =2347064366110

Abstract

Africa, a continent endowed with immense natural and human resources as well as great cultural ecological and economic diversity, remains under -developed as a result of perennial challenges such as military dictatorships, corruption, civil unrest and poverty. Numerous developmental strategies have however failed to yield positive results, this ugly trend made many to believe that the continent is doomed to perpetual poverty, political and economic slavery. The study therefore aims at examining how African culture can be employed to enhance the expected development. Being an historical research, the paper utilizes historical framework in its analysis. The findings however revealed that the culture of Africans that is , behaviour and beliefs that are negative such as tax dodging, unfair trade policies, brain drain of skilled workers, the dictatorial principles of the leaders coupled with corruption have greatly inhibited African development. In view of this, the study however recommends that cultural change, most especially from negative to positive will bring about the needed development in Africa.

Introduction

Africa is a vast continent with diversity of cultures. The culture of Africa is varied and manifold consisting of a mixture of tribes that each have their own unique characteristics. As succinctly expressed by

Christopher (2002) it is a product of the diverse population that today inhabits the continent of Africa and the African Diaspora.

There are probably as many different definitions of culture as there are different cultures. According to Zimmerman, as quoted by Kakonge (2017), "culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social, habitats, music and arts". UNESCO, as cited in Kakonge (2017), has adopted a broad definition stating that culture is that "complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, moral, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a member of society".

Tunde (2007) submits that culture entails all that people have learned and preserved from past collective experiences. He further explains that culture encompasses the tangible and intangible as it also incorporates the "sub-total of the materials and immaterial tools, art work and knowledge accumulated by the people". The peculiarity of a given culture therefore, is a function of its distinctiveness as it relates to its impact on the attitudes, aspirations, motivation, representations, skills and behaviour of the people celebrating some and discarding others. Bates and Julian cited in Tunde (2007) noted that a considerable part of culture is ideas that bear directly or indirectly on behaviour. It can be sustained and kept alive only by social behaviour.

Africa is divided into a great number of ethnic cultures. The continent's cultural regeneration has also been an integral aspect of post independence nation- building with a recognition of the need to harness the cultural resources to enrich the process of education requiring the creation of an enabling environment in a number of ways.

Unfortunately, negative cultural attitude by Africans had affected development in the continent .By African development we mean the process in which Africa grows or changes and becomes more advanced. In view of this, the paper examines the perennial challenges in Africa; African culture that inhibit development and how it can be utilized to enhance the expected development.

Perennial challenges in African

African continent makes up 6% of the earth's surface and 20% of the land mass. It has an area of 30.2 million km²([https://www.ghana web.com](https://www.ghana.web.com)). According to world Health Organization (WHO), The 54 countries in Africa together have a population of about one billion or about 14% of the populations of the world, close to 1000 different languages are spoken in the continent. Africa's contribution to world trade is 1% and 25 of the world's poorest countries are in Africa (<https://www.ghana web.com>).

A critical look at the above mind-boggling revelation shows that there are problems in the continent. We shall therefore examine the challenges facing African continent sequentially. The most terrible problem confronting Africans is crisis of leadership. Most African leaders persistently fail to provide for the people they lead basic necessities for survival. These basic needs include food, shelter, clothing, health and security. The failure to have these basic needs implies that Africans will continue to depend on other continents for survival. Other signs of leadership crisis are alarming and persuasive. There is a widespread loss of faith in African major institutions such as the judiciary and law enforcement agencies generally(<http8://www.ghana.web.com>). There is alarming breakdown of traditional values. Instead of addressing and solving the problems confronting the continent most African leaders are busy amassing wealth. Some of these leaders are so selfish to the extent that they are not conscious of the challenges facing their subjects. Most of these self-centered leaders are not willing to relinquish power. After many years of misrule late Mumuh Gaddafi of Libya, Sanni Abacha of Nigeria refused to relinquish power to their new elected presidents. The most recent Gambia crisis erupted because of Yayah Jammeh's refusal to relinquish power to Adama Barrow .Election took place in December 1,2016 and Yaya Jammeh initially accepted the result ,but a week later he reversed his decision. At his request, Gambia's parliament voted to extend his term by 90 days. Mr Barrow who won the election fled to neighbouring Senegal amid fears that

he could be jailed or even killed, if he stayed in Gambia. He was eventually sworn-in at the Gambia embassy in Senegal.

African leaders do not seem to realize that the real difference between the developed countries of America, Europe, Asia and the far East and the underdeveloped countries of Africa lies in their technological capability, (<https://www.ghana.web.com>). This capability has been defined as the extent to which countries, access, utilize and create science and technology as the solution to socio-economic problems. African leaders fail to realize that the world is essentially driven by technology. It is a fact that cannot be disputed that Energy, agriculture, medicine and health, clean air and water, transportation, sanitation, and conservation of natural resources are all based ultimately in science and technology. It is however obvious that for Africa to be part of that development in the world, there must be science and technology elements in the development process.

African countries have not been able to change the structure of their economy since political independent but still rely on the export of raw materials such as cocoa, gold, timber, bauxite, diamond manganese and oil because of the failure to adopt science and technology as criteria for development. Not until African leaders begin to realize the role science and technology play in the development of the world, the so call African development will remain a mirage, mere floppishness, delusion and phantasm.

Leaders in Africa have failed to study and know developmental history of countries that have made it in the last 50 years. Korea for instance has transformed itself from a stagnant agrarian society into one of the most dynamic industrial economies of the world within 40 years (<https://www.ghana.web.com>). In the early 1960s when Korea first lunched its industrialization efforts, it was a typical poor developing country with poor resources, production base and small domestic market. Korea's GNP in 1961 was only 2.3 billion (in 1030 prices or \$87 per capital which came mainly from the primary sectors). As late as 1970, the three top exports

were Textile, Plywood and Wigs. Korea is now 13th largest economy and one of the major trading countries of the world (<https://www.kengaplex.com>).

Africans have relegated themselves to the background and even devalued themselves to the extent that they think only foreigners can help them out of their misery. Over-dependency on foreigners has so much affected the expected development in Africa. "Institutionalized" corruption is another challenge facing Africa as a continent. Africans seem to have legalized corruption, there are corruption everywhere to the extent that leaders are not trusted and citizens do not see that they have a stake in their country and its future.

It is unfortunate and even pathetic that most Africans do not see any virtue in working for the future of their countries. Leaders have not been able to invoke in the citizens the spirit of nation building. An antagonistic spirit has possessed political opponents who continuously knock the heads of unsuspecting Africans together while the population continues to wallow in poverty and despair (<https://www.ghana.web.com>).

African culture that inhibit development

There are many things that come from African culture, a sense of identity, diversity in languages, attitude and so on. Africa no doubt is rich in culture but instead of using these cultures to enhance development they are negatively used to inhibit development. The most disturbing aspect of the African predicament is the fact that an average African does not believe in himself as a human being, he doesn't believe that anything good can still come out of the continent. The harsh history, the pain of the present and the uncertainties of the future offer no consolation, he therefore strongly desires to turn elsewhere for salvation. An average black person is ecstatic and immensely grateful about getting a visa to Europe or America, as though it were a pass to Heaven. The black man treats his fellow black with disdain but has a subservient disposition to the white man. This African culture has seriously inhibited development.

Another aspect of African culture that hinders development is the attitude of not wanting to see someone else or another tribe succeed more than our own. You see Africans planning to pull down people that do not belong to their own tribe. They cast aspersions on political leaders from other tribes. Tribalism, nepotism and jealousy are therefore part of the characteristics of an average African.

The vicious circle of poverty also no doubt hinders the expected development in Africa. The vicious circle of poverty refers to a self-reinforcing situation whereby certain factors exist that tend to perpetuate an undesirable phenomenon. In developing countries, vicious circle of poverty can be viewed on both demand and supply sides. The demand side implies the low levels of income leading to low level of demand which in turn lead to low rate of investment and corresponding lack of capital, low productivity and low income. From a supply side, low productivity implies low income which in turn implies low savings and low level of investment leading to deficiency of capital.

Corruption and resource mismanagement has considerably hampered development as public funds meant for development have sometimes been diverted to private use. Donor funds meant for development have often been mismanaged. The case of police pension fund fraud in Nigeria is a perfect example. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) arraigned the ex-permanent secretary in the ministry of Niger Delta Affairs who later became a director in the police pension office, Atiku Abubakar Kigo, the chief accountant, Mrs. Uzoma Cyril Attang, and four others before an Abuja high court on 18- count charge of conspiracy, breach of trust and embezzlement of N32 billion police pension fund. The six accused persons were dated before justice Hussain Baba to whom the case was reassigned following a controversial judgement of the first trial Judge, Justice Abubakar Talbar, who gave a light sentence to one of the accused (<https://www.naija.ng>).

Lack of entrepreneurial skills is also part of African culture that had from time immemorial inhibited development in Africa. Entrepreneurs

play a major role in development. Development of entrepreneurial skill may sometimes be hindered by government policies which in trying to maintain a particular social order may deny those with entrepreneurial talent a chance to exercise their talents.

In many African countries, individuals lack key skill and knowledge required for economic development. Lack of adequate human resources lead to low productivity and factor immobility. This implies that there is low knowledge on alternatives production methods, natural resources and opportunities.

Another aspect of African culture that is inhibiting development is the belief that African cannot do anything on their own when they dissociate themselves from people of other race. After independence most African countries are technologically backward. They absolutely rely on foreign loans for survival. Africans have the mentality that their economy will improve as European countries are ready to assist.

Inferiority complex is another enemy of progress and development in Africa. Africans always play second fiddle to the Europeans in everything. They see degree obtained in African universities as inferior to that of the Europeans. Products packaged outside Africa are considered the best. They prefer to buy products that have label such as Japan, Canada, India and even China because of the belief that the products are of good qualities than that of the Africa.

Coupled with the above is the belief that nothing good can come out of Africans. A graduate in Africa who gets job in one of the Banks in Africa prefers, to wash toilets in Canada, Spain, Paris and so on because of the belief that nobody can stay in Africa and succeed. An average African therefore, prefers selling his house to process American Visa. This erroneous belief has negatively affected African development.

African culture of little work big profit or gain is another factor that has hindered the expected development in Africa. Though, Africans are diligent and industrious yet there is this feeling among some Africans that it is the blessing of God that makes one rich. With this belief, some African

youths prefer a kind of job that can make them rich with little efforts. This might be one of the reasons why some engage in criminal activities such as kidnapping, Robbery, cybercafe crimes popularly known as “yahoo yahoo” and so on. These kind of attitudes, are often been referred to in popular debate about African culture and development as attributes that do not encourage development.

Most Africans also belief that their countries are too backward that the so call development is a mere phantasm. Singapore, which in 1819 was a village with 120 fishermen without any natural resources and hinterland, propelled itself from third world squalor to first world affluence in just 35 years(<https://www.ghana web.com>). Regardless of the level of backwardness and underdevelopment in Africa, if Africans can repackage their mindsets and jettison this terrible aspect of their culture, African continent will no doubt progress.

Lack of confidence in fellow Africans no matter how knowledgeable and highly placed is another cog in the wheel of African progress and development. As earlier stated it is this work, lack of confidence and over-dependence in foreign goods at the expense of African products, is part of African culture. This kind of culture hinders development and progress.

In African society as observed by Okafor and cited in Kakonge (2017), everyone is accommodated through the extended family system. According to him, if a family has one relatively successful member, that fortunate person is expected to provide the necessities of life such as school fees, medical care, clothing, housing, and even pocket money for many others. Though this culture encourages a charitable disposition and fosters cohesive family loyalties, in some instances it is exploited and abused by members of the family. In this way, it can even create dependency instead of encouraging siblings to learn how to stand on their feet. Moreover, these siblings are rarely appreciative and they may even gang up against their beneficiary. In most cases, the persistent demands of the extended family may prevent the successful member from investing in a way that could permanently improve the living standards of the entire family. The most

disturbing part of the story is when poor relatives become envious and want a share of the successful family member's properties and assets, the successful family member becomes isolated and is encouraged from further helping the extended family. This aspect of African culture is psychologically debilitating and extremely frustrating.

It is generally believed that Africans have no concept of time. Africans are not good at keeping time. In some African countries, participants in workshops or seminars have to be given incentives not only for their attendance but also for being punctual. Unfortunately, most developed countries expect that activities be completed in a timely fashion. As a result of this negative culture, African business men and women find it difficult to compete on the global market and a number of them have lost their contracts because they have not met their deadlines.

Another pathetic aspect of African culture is the idea of job discrimination. Until recently there were some jobs that Africans would not take. During the 1970s and 1980s for example as observed by Konge (2017), many Africans in major towns and cities had a tendency to avoid certain jobs because of cultural or sexual stereotypes. Men were reluctant to work as cleaners, cooks, waiters in hotels and if they did, they would say that they were still looking for a proper job or were doing a temporary job while they looked for a government one. They were hoping to be clerks, soldiers, policemen and drivers. In view of African weak economies featuring high unemployment and poverty, all available vacancies or jobs should be filled by willing recruits without discriminating as to gender or cultural considerations.

In some African countries, it is part of the culture that men are accorded recognition based on the number of wives they marry. A man with only one wife is considered a lazy one, in most cases he cannot be allowed to contribute to any public discussion and when he is allowed his opinion is not respected. Chieftaincy titles cannot be given to him. This kind of culture promotes and encourages polygamy. In some instances some of these men with many wives are irresponsible and unable to take good care

of their wives and children thereby contributing greatly to the economic problem affecting the continent.

Closely related to the above is lack of population control which is a major setback in Africa. Some of the children given birth to are not given sound education and in most cases some of them grow up to become nuisance and even criminals in the society. It is a fact that cannot be disputed that no society can grow beyond the level of its leadership, if children that are the future leaders are left without proper training then the future will definitely remain bleak.

Tax evasion is another aspect of African culture that remains a cog in the wheel of progress. The tax collectors in Africa often find it difficult as a result of the people who have developed the culture of dodging taxes. Taxes government would have spent on infrastructural and human development are not paid by the people. How then would the needed development not hindered?

Utilizing African culture to enhance the expected development

Having earlier established that African is very rich in culture, there is therefore need for African to jettison the negative aspects of their culture and should be conscious of the fact that positive aspects of the same culture can be used to entrench progressive human development, enhance creativity and increase productivity for the common good.

First and foremost, Africans must come to term with the fact that their development depends on their ability to understand, interpret, select, adapt, use transmit, diffuse, produce and commercialize scientific and technological knowledge in ways appropriate to their culture, aspirations and level of development.

The culture of cooperation and partnership inherent in African societies should be made to continue. This culture had helped Africans in the past and still remains a valuable cultural capital that will move the continent forward. During the fight against apartheid in south Africa, freedom fighters sought unity in their songs in the battle against their

oppressors. Most of the leaders acknowledged that liberation songs were not only a morale booster but also fueled and united them to continue fighting until they were free (Kakonge, 2017).

The culture of diligence in Africans should also be sustained, many Africans employees of major multinationals have worked hard and given exemplary services which has helped to make these companies profitable. African should therefore use this culture to entrench progressive human development in their own countries.

The spirit of communalism that pervaded traditional African societies also should be encouraged. Though colonialism appears to have divided African continent along ethnic and religious line, nevertheless, for Africans to develop, we must strive to explore the traditional intertribal communal relations which thrived on the recognition of our differences and respect for our visible distinctiveness. We must exist together and see ourselves as one. This is achievable without compromising our respective cultures.

Conclusion

In this study, we have been able to examine the perennial challenges in Africa, aspects of the culture that inhibit development and how African culture can be utilized to enhance the expected development. The challenge before us as Africans is to put our negative cultural practices and lukewarm attitude towards development behind us, we can come abreast with developed countries instead of relying on them for financial support.

In all reality, the expected development in Africa is never an unattainable grandiose or mere illusion. It is indeed achievable as long as Africans are ready to adhere to the principle of co-operation and partnership inherent in their culture. The continent will witness tremendous development if the culture of diligence is sustained.

African government at all levels should also formulate policies that will encourage entrepreneurial skills which will encourage those with entrepreneurial talents and others to exercise their talents. Inferiority

complex and lack of confidence in fellow Africans which had from time immemorial remained the bane of African development should be nipped in the bud as people repackage their mind-set toward development.

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