

TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NIGERIAN CULTURAL POLICY FOR THE PROMOTION OF CULTURE IN NIGERIA

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objects, method of thinking, of eating and of talking, as well as customs and institutions into which each member of the society is born.

This means that it is a descriptive and complex concept with wideranging and comprehensive connotations, which refers to and reflects a people's way of living, permutation, ideologies, belief, etcetera. As such, culture refers to a social hostage that is, all the knowledge, beliefs, customs and skills that are available to the members of a society (Broom 50).

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state endeared with rich cultures. Incidentally, as observed by Ernest-Samuel (2002):

Its major cultures seem to be decimated by geographic boundaries, giving birth to distinct cultures between the northern and southern regions of the nation.

The importance of culture in any nation can not be over-emphasised. UNESCO has observed that cultural and economic independence and restoration are important spring boards to the attainment of sovereign statuses. The importance of culture as enumerated by Fitcher (270) can be enumerated as follows:

- i. Guidance of societal behaviour
- ii. Exercise of social control
- iii. Serving as stamp that marks Nigeria from another society.
- iv. Interpretation and integration of Nigerian cultural values and institutions.
- v. Furnishing the basis for social solidarity and unity.
- vi. Serving as an architect and a moulder of social personality.
- vii. Receiving, reserving and legitimising cultural accretion and development from time to time.
- viii. Storing the social heritage and values of the people.
- ix. Serving as the foundation of effective socialisation (or

Abstract

Nigeria is among one of the African countries that took a cue from Ghana to formulate its national cultural policy at the insistence of the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Since 1976 when Nigerian formulated her cultural policy till date (2009), gaping loopholes exist which hinder the promotion of culture as documented in the cultural policy.

This paper provides a guideline for the promotion of culture in Nigeria vis a vis the integration of traditional values by the government (state action). In order to address the issue sequentially, this paper discusses culture and its importance before x-raying the role of state action in the promotion of culture in Nigeria. It proffers solutions towards the implementation of the Nigerian Cultural Policy to ensure that culture is promoted in the country.

Culture and its Importance

Although several scholars have tried to give different definitions of the term "culture" based on their understanding of the word, all have agreed that every nation or society is known for its own culture. This means that culture is dynamic as well as distinct among societies. Ukeje (1973) quoted by Ezikeojiaku (1997) notes that:

"Culture" is the fabric of ideas, skills, tools, aesthetic

citizenship training and dedication).

- x. Serving as avenue for learning leadership and political skills, laws, taboos and regulations...

Bearing all these in mind, culture can thus be viewed as an icon of identity for every citizen or member of a community hence there is need for every government, administration or leader to protect and promote her culture and basic institutions since a distinct society can only be recognised by the culture which its members share.

State Action towards Promotion of Culture

State action are those activities or actions which are packaged, designed or formulated by government, and which are geared towards the achievement of its objectives or purpose. With reference to the promotion of culture, state action on culture is represented by the cultural policy for Nigeria, which is a legal document prescribing guidelines, procedures, methods and practice of culture in the country. It also includes other pronouncements or laws instituted in furtherance of cultural practice. Section 4 subsection 1 of the cultural policy for Nigeria highlights four broad categories of state action namely:

- i. Preservation of culture.
- ii. Promotion of culture
- iii. Presentation of culture
- iv. Establishment of administrative structure and the provision of fund for its implementation.

These four categories capture all important aspects of promoting culture as seen in the contents as listed below. The preservation of culture as defined in the cultural policy for Nigeria relates to:

The promotion of cultural property whether of concrete or non-concrete nature, past or present,

written or oral, or relating to values or facts of history with the aid of research and documentation. (7)

Promotion of culture entails providing avenues to ensure cultural education, consciousness and development vis a vis encouraging the integration of traditional values in the day-to-day life of the people. Presentation of culture as stipulated in the policy refers to:

The means by which culture is disseminated in its bid to facilitate the accessibility of arts and culture to the widest spectrum of Nigeria eg. through theatre, films, exhibitions, seminars, workshops and publication or the mass media. (7)

Administration and financing of culture involve:

Establishing administrative structures and institutions for promoting the objectives of the cultural policy, providing the framework to enable these administrative structures and institutions to generate funds as well as to ensure generation of fund through private sources. (8)

Given the watertight content of the policy, one expects that Nigerian culture would be popular and celebrated as for example, that of most Asian nations, especially after more than thirty years of the policy's existence. Sadly, this is not the situation. Part 4 Section 3 subsection 1 (4.3.1) of the policy notes that 'the state shall take steps to encourage the integration of traditional values into the fabric of daily life'. As it were, the failure to integrate traditional values in the day-to-day life of the people has adversely affected the implementation of the policy, as well as the promotion of culture in Nigeria. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines tradition as 'a belief and custom passed from one generation to the next... any long established method, practice etc'. Value means

quality of being useful, worthwhile or important. As such, value does not consist of desires but is rather in the desirables, that is, what we do not only want, but feel that it is right and proper to want for ourselves and for others (Oxford, 1989). Given the definition of traditional value, value system means a conglomeration of all practices or qualities that have been found intrinsically worthy or good or estimable and have been cultivated and nurtured by a group of people or society from generation to generation (Ugbeyavwighren, 2008). Nigeria as a multi-ethnic state boasts of multifarious cultures within the nation. However, a society is expected to express itself through its cultural modes, and culture is best expressed through the medium of the arts such as literary arts, fine and plastic arts and the theatrical arts. (Ernest-Samuel, 2002). While the literary arts include oral traditions such as riddles, poems, epics, language and so on, fine and plastic arts include material cultures such as arts and crafts from solid materials such as wood, metal, fabrics, stores and others; while the theatrical arts include festivals, songs, dances, and so on, which inculcate music, drama and spectacle. It is expected that any policy geared towards promoting Nigerian culture would be literary, plastic or theatrical, and able to integrate the people's values. For instance, part of our traditional values include respect for humanity and human dignity, respect for legitimate authority, dignity of labour and respect for positive morals and religious values. Incidentally, within Nigeria, governments have paid lip service to respect for humanity and human dignity. Many state policies have been formulated without regards for the citizens or their well being. Some administrative structures have been established, but those in power by omission or commission chose to deploy their siblings and relations to such establishments irrespective of whether they are qualified or not, instead of employing qualified personnel who are not related to them. Structures for promotion of culture have been high-jacked by those at the helm of affairs and such establishments have been

converted to serve the selfish interests of those at the top. Seminars and workshops are organised basically to create avenues to spend government allocation on promotion of culture and not to achieve the real objectives of the exercise. The resultant effect is that generation of funds instead of the promotion of culture, promote the image of those organising and managing the programme. Many government officials have publicised their interests in preserving Nigeria's cultural heritage in the media, but have secretly sold the people's prized artifacts to expatriates for the lure of foreign currencies. Fat budgets for cultural carnivals/revivals have been drawn for the nation, but greater percentage of the expenses go to unrealistic and false ends designed to hoodwink the polity to ensure that no one raises eyebrows, hence every year, it is common to hear about cultural events like Abuja carnival, NAFEST, Ahiajoku Lectures and their likes, without any concrete foundation for the sustenance of such events for the purpose of preserving and promoting Nigerian culture.

The Way Forward

The state should not only be practical in the implementation of the policy, but patriotic as well. It is important that effort is made to recognize the traditional values of the distinct culture areas in Nigeria and integrate such values into the individual state action plan for cultural promotion. This will enable the citizens to inculcate them in their day-to-day lives. For instance, Part nine (9) Section two (2) and Subsection one (1) (9.2.1) of the Cultural Policy for Nigeria recognises 'language as an important aspect of culture and a vehicle for cultural expression and transmission'. Part five (5) section one (1) subsection one (1) (5.1.1) of the policy also recognises that transmission of culture to the younger generation is a guaranteed means of promoting and perpetuating that culture. It is disheartening therefore to note that the state has not provided any official platform for the promotion and gainful utilisation of

the numerous mother tongues spoken in Nigerian; instead, Nigeria languages are gradually giving way to English, French, German, Arabic and even Chinese. While the nationals of these foreign languages encourage students with scholarship awards and oversea sponsorships as a way of encouraging the use of their languages, our own government proudly adopt these languages as lingua franca without assessing the long term effect on our cultures and traditions. Language remains the most important traditional value which people are identified with and respected for, and it is a very important vehicle for the promotion of culture, tradition, morality and social changes.

Promotion of culture should not be a statement on a piece of paper called 'a policy'. It should involve patronage. The state would patronise our tradition and values, by integrating them in state actions. The cultural policy for Nigeria indicates that the state is interested in presenting, promoting, preserving and maintaining Nigerian culture, yet the Nigerian government encourages importation of foreign goods embodying foreign tastes and customs, to the detriment of available local products. Government Officials appear in state functions in safaris and French suits, while our traditional wears are reserved as 'costumes' for shows or carnivals. Government houses are decorated with Italian marbles instead of the natural Paladiana marbles that are mined in our very soil. Loans are given to traders to import foreign rice and wrappers, instead of encouraging local industries that produce these products such as Abakili rice producers and *Akwette* weavers. Traditional cultural practices such as *Irumgbede* - the traditional female outing ceremony in some parts of Igboland have been abandoned because in the case of *Irumgbede* and other ceremonies like it, the allegation is that they encouraged indecent exposure of young ladies; yet today, States sponsor beauty pageants and expose young girls to near-nudity.

Preservation of culture cannot be achieved by cultural

extinction. If people do not practice their culture, it becomes near impossible to preserve or maintain it. A culture that encourages young girls to be chaste until they marry should be encouraged. Unfortunately, that culture is extinct in most parts of Nigeria. Our culture is suffering a setback owing to colonialism. As observed by Ugbeyavwighren (2008) colonialism not only dehumanised Africans but also acculturated them, hence today Christians condemn our cultural songs, annual festivals and other traditional practices as being fetish and idolatry. Owing to what Ugbeyarwighren termed, 'the disoriented inward search for development impulses and oriented total dependence on imported impulses', on the part of Nigerian leaders, our cultural values have been westernised and some abolished.

For record purposes it should be noted that the conflict between Christianity for instance and culture is not with Christianity but with culture of the missionaries who brought the gospel. For instance Christ himself never condemned the culture of the Jews. Even Paul the Jewish missionary never prescribed Jewish traditions or robes for his converts in Europe. Moreso, as noted by Akpan (1984) many aspects of our culture fulfill Christian principles for instance:

- i. Libation - grace before eating or drinking
- ii. Confinement and fettering of girls before marriage - chastity
- iii. Belief in re-incarnation - return to life after death.

Traditional religion ensured order in the society hence there was high morality. For instance, stealing, murder, adultery were all abhorred. These, basically form part of the Ten Commandments. Therefore, traditional African culture was not anti-christian. As Akpan observed, the only uncompleted element in our culture was that it made no provision for the "salvation of soul" notwithstanding its belief in the existence of life after death. As such, the State should recognise, project, and promote our

traditional religious values and cultures, instead of allowing international politics, or what Kalu Uka dubbed; 'the unmistakably denigrating contempt of our colonial master' to rob us of our identity.

Good Examples So Far

Abia state under the administration of Gov. Orji Uzor Kalu made it mandatory for civil servants in the state to wear the traditional (native) attires every Wednesday simply to project and promote the state dress culture. This helped inculcate the habit of dressing in native attire into the citizens. Also, the Nigerian Television Authority mandated all its network newscasters to adorn only traditional attires during news presentations on the network service and this inadvertently spread to the local stations since most of the newscasters once in a while present national news through the zonal headquarters. Today, the network news time has become a time when fashion freaks (particularly women) look out for reigning and beautiful Nigerian designs.

In Rivers State, 'fedora' cap has become the 'trade mark' of the indigenes. Incidentally, this cap is typical of the Ikwerreman but was popularised by their former, Governor Dr. Peter Odili. Today, all Rivers state indigenes take pride in adorning the cap. This would not have been impossible had Odili not used himself as the model. And in Benue state, the Tiv's have popularised their traditional attire - a navy-blue and white striped wrap, which has helped to give them an identity.

Because of the values of these cultures, in terms of what they mean to indigenes, there is need to preserve and promote them, in order to ensure that though in a dynamic society the legacy is extended for the benefit of generations to come.

Conclusion

Culture is capable of not only shaping our consciousness but

also setting a pace for our standard behaviour. Although Nigeria can boast of a standard cultural policy, yet not much attempt has been made to implement the policy. The danger is that the policy may remain mere ideas on paper if our traditional values are not integrated in the State action.

To achieve this therefore, those entrusted with the job of implementation, should make efforts to put those valuable proposals of the policy into practice and set a pace for the mass of the people to follow, because this will encourage a sense of cultural identity and pride among the people of Nigeria.

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