

ART AND CULTURE ADMINISTRATION: THE EDO STATE EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This paper examines government policies vis-à-vis art and culture administration in Edo State of Nigeria. This is with a view to determining the extent to which these policies have affected the growth and development of art and culture in the state. In carrying out this assessment, the activities of Edo State Council for Arts and Culture will be examined being the agency charged with cultural administration in the state. It is against this backdrop that this paper highlights the management problems and suggests possible solutions towards achieving improved performance in the years ahead.

Introduction

The Edo State Council for Arts and Culture was provisionally established in April, 1972 and remained in that capacity until it was reconstituted by Edict No. 1 of 1973. The Edict entitled "Midwest Arts Council Edict" is applicable to Edo State of Nigeria. In conformity with government's implementation strategy of promoting, preserving and presenting the rich cultural heritage of the state, the council was established as an autonomous body administered by a Board of Directors referred to as the "Council." The Edict vested the day-to-day administration of the council in the Director of Culture who is also the Chief Executive. The enabling law provides for the constitution of local government arts committees responsible for organizing cultural activities in the local government areas of the state.

As a way of foregrounding this discourse, it would be profiting to attempt a clarification of certain operative terms. In this regard, art refers to "all the creative disciplines such as literature, drama, poetry, dance, music and visual arts. The visual arts are those artistic creativities that seek to communicate primarily through the eye; they include architecture, graphics and textile design, etc" (Ohangbon, 1980).

The Nigerian Cultural Policy (1986) defines culture "as the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in its environment the social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization which together distinguish a people from its neighbours". It comprises the material, institutional, philosophical and creative aspects. Its material aspects deal with tools, clothing, food, medicines, utensils, housing, etc. Its institutional aspects deal with political, social, legal and economic structures enacted to promote the material and spiritual progress of the people concerned. Its philosophical aspect promotes and develops ideas, ideals, beliefs

and values while the creative aspects are responsible for the people's literature, their visual and performing arts which are normally moulded by, as well as help to mould other aspects of culture. According to Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, culture refers to:

- i. The improvement, refinement of development by study, training, etc.
- ii. The training and refining of the mind, emotions, manners, taste, etc.
- iii. The result of this refinement of thought, emotions, manners, taste, etc.
- iv. The concepts, habits, skills, arts, instrument, institutions, etc, of a given people in a given period; civilization (Guranik and Joseph, 1964).

Akerele in his article entitled "Cultural Renewal in a Changing Society like Nigeria," summarizes the essence of culture "as the development and refinement of the various aspects of the ways of life of a people over time". He simplifies it further "as the totality of a people's way of life (1980). The foregoing definitions are very apt, illuminating and enlightening and would suffice for the purpose of this study.

Functions of the Council

According to section (10) of the Edict, the council has responsibility for the following duties:

- a. To organise festivals of arts at local levels and to enter into and make arrangements for and generally take charge of the state's participation in arts festivals;
- b. To serve as the cultural centre of the state;
- c. To organize exhibitions of the arts of the state;
- d. To organize and conduct lectures, demonstrations and research on matters relating to the arts and culture of the state;
- e. To publish or sponsor and make necessary arrangement for the performance of dancing troupes, theatrical and similar clubs undertaking tours within and outside the state;
- f. To manage the state's arts theatre and establish arts galleries;
- g. To make rules and regulations with respect to the holding of competitions in the arts and to award prizes thereof;
- h. To work in cooperation and enter into arrangement with any other body engaged in or connected with the promotion of the arts and culture of the country or organization thereof;
- i. To accept, hold and administer any subscriptions, gifts, grants or other such benefits for any purpose which may be advantageously concerned with the promotion of the arts and culture of the state;
- j. Generally to carry on such other activities and undertakings as in the view of the council may be directly or indirectly conducive to the attainment of the above functions or any of them or otherwise calculated to promote the objects of the council.

Administrative Structure

For purpose of good and effective administration, the functions are shared amongst the following divisions namely:

- a. Research, Documentation and Publication.
- b. Administration and Finance
- c. Performing Arts
- d. Visual Arts
- e. Field and Festivals Organization

Arising from the need to create a resident performing troupe in the council, management, in 1976 decided to expand and reorganize the Performing Arts Division. This development was an imaginative strategy to reach out to the numerous art-loving people of the state and beyond. The troupe was also set up to serve as a model to non-established or alternative cultural groups in the state. Its mandate includes:

- i. Exploring and developing the artistic and creative potentials in drama, dance and music;
- ii. Developing the literature in the areas of the performing arts;
- iii. Arranging training for performing artistes; and
- iv. Awakening interest in the performing arts.

Notable Achievements of the Council

The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC '77) was held in Nigeria from January 15 to February 12, 1977. This global event served as a launching pad for the council in its desire to attain prominence as an enterprising cultural institution in the country. The council represented the state creditably in the festival and won many prizes. It is on record that through the efforts of one of its employees, Mr. Joseph Alufa Igbinovia Obayagbona, a fine replica of the ivory mask of Queen Idia was produced to commemorate the global festival. The original ivory mask had been looted by the British and encased in the British museum in London. The Federal Government of Nigeria, in appreciation of the invaluable contribution of the council to the success of the event, conferred on Mr. Alufa Igbinovia the award of the Member of the Order of the Niger (M.O.N). Indeed, this rare achievement of the council brought great honour and glory to the people of the state and all black peoples of the world.

In 1988 and 1989, the council featured prominently in the National Festival of Arts and Culture and won in two successive years, the president's gold gong which was the overall prize for the festival.

In the field of research, the council made considerable impact by making some publications on the marriage customs of the people of Bendel State. Its academic journal, *Ivies*, which was exceedingly popular with the academia, had many editions of it published before going out of circulation.

The City Decoration Programme (CDP) was introduced in the state in 1988 in partial fulfillment of the provisions of the edict establishing the council. This initiative of the council led to the production of sculptural pieces which are mounted in various locations in the state. Notable amongst these are the statue of a Benin Chief in full ceremonial regalia located at the King's Square, a Town Crier at the Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ) press centre along reservation road, a Maiden Dancer at Airport Road and Queen Idia Statue at the Uselu/Urubi

junction, Benin City. In response to the council's appeal for public support, Edo Club, a social cultural organization in Benin decided to fund the production of the statue of "General Asoro" which was unveiled in Benin City on 11th June, 1988. The statue produced by Bello Kuranga, a private creative artist is located at the Sokponba Road Junction, King's Square, Benin City. These projects were undertaken by the council to concretize the aesthetic and functional values of the arts.

It is worthy to mention the once very popular craft-shop which was located in the present Unity Bank building, King's Square, Benin City. This was an important tourist facility in the state in view of the amazing collections of ancient and contemporary artworks. A major art exhibition christened "1,000 Years of Benin Art" was organized by the council from October 25 to November 1, 1999. It was easily one of the best organized in recent years in the state. It drew art patrons and tourists from all over the country and beyond.

These achievements represent the highlights of what the council was able to do over the years. It is however regrettable that not much had been achieved by the council since then. The remote cause of this development could be traced to the obnoxious self sustenance policy introduced in the state in 1996 by the Group Capt. Adamu Iyam's administration. It is to be noted that the advent of the democratic system of government in 1999 have not done much to redress this precarious situation in the state's council for arts and culture sector. The reasons for this development are not far-fetched. The appearance of some over zealous politicians on the corridors of power aided by callous and irresponsible government officials appear to have contributed immensely to the plight of the council. Some of these politicians had no regard for due process and therefore did everything to circumvent the law.

Some Unfavourable Policies of Government

- a. The self sustenance policy earlier referred to affected in no small way the plans and programmes of the council. The policy required the council, including selected parastatals in the state to fend for themselves from their internally generated revenue. Government no longer gave subvention to the council for the payment of salaries and allowances of workers and overhead for the prosecution of its programmes. This was a rash decision as it did not take into account the viability of the council. Besides, government did not give adequate prior notice before implementing the policy and no take off grant was given to the council. All the vehicles in the council had been grounded for many years due to neglect by government. The policy was no doubt a violation of the provisions of section 15, 1(a) of the Edict which states that: the funds and resources of the council shall consist of such sums as may be provided by the state. Section 15, 1(c) of the same Edict also states that: the council's resources shall consist of all sums collected or received by the council in the execution of this Edict.

In spite of the above provisions, a subsisting government policy required the council to remit all internally generated revenue into the coffers of the state government. This decision was carried out in expectation that funds would be released for the running of the council. The only improvement noticeable after the removal of the self-sustenance policy by the Lucky Igbinedion administration in 1999 is the guarantee of regular payment of salaries and allowances. Nothing else has changed since then.

Before implementing the self sustenance policy, government should have taken advantage of the provision of section 10 (j) of the Edict which empowers the council “to accept, hold and administer any subscriptions, gifts, grants or other such benefits ... concerned with the promotion of arts and culture in the state.” Implementation of this provision required the necessary legislative framework which government ought to have provided. There was nothing wrong for government to have established an endowment fund with appropriate legislation to which government and the private sector would have made contribution.

b. Section 10 (9) of the Edict vests on the council the responsibility for the management of the state's arts theatre. The section states that: “It shall be the duty of the council to manage the state's arts theatre...” In practice, the Oba Akenzua Cultural Centre is at present being run by the State Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism. By running, the centre directly, the Ministry has consciously and deliberately usurped the statutory functions of the council. Such an action is capable of generating role conflicts and unnecessary duplication of efforts.

The cultural centre, being a revenue yielding venture, the revenue derivable could have been channeled to the running of the council. The ministry ought to confine itself to policy making and the traditional supervisory role.

c. Section 10 (a) of the Edict confers on the council the responsibility “to organize festivals of arts...” But in December, 2009, the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism did organize a well publicized state festival of arts which was later aborted for unknown reasons. Like the previous cases, the ministry has also usurped the functions of the council with regard to festival organization. Considering the unfavourable role the ministry continues to play in the scheme of things, one can only hope that government would not one day decide to scrap the parastatal on account of redundancy.

d. Not too long ago, the Arts Council was evicted from its administrative building located within the cultural centre premises. This was to give way to the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism which previously occupied a building within the Ezoti office complex. The council has been made to occupy every available space within the cultural centre building in spite of the non-conducive nature of the environment for meaningful work. The centre was designed to have only one office space which is used by the theatre manager. A visit to the centre would reveal a sorry sight as the workers are forced to idle away under the trees adorning the centre as a result of the noise nuisance emanating from the stage during performance. One would have hoped that the man hour lost in this way should have been channeled to other useful ends.

- e. The Benin Craft Centre built in 1992 by the Nigerian Breweries Plc as part of its corporate responsibility to the good people of Edo State was designed “to train the youths in various handicrafts in order to make them self reliant and future employers of labour.” In spite of the noble objectives of the centre, there was an attempt to convert it to a restaurant in 1999 but for the stiff resistance put forth by the management of the council at the time. From all indications, this decision stemmed from a selfish motive on the part of the ministry.
- f. The irrational decision of government to retire its work force in the year 2000 affected the council adversely: the action was not only ill advised, it was also counter productive as government found itself spending more as wage bill contrary to expectation. Due to government's action, many of the best trained professionals in the council were laid off without recourse to need, training, experience and competence. This bad policy of government has led to the dearth of quality professional staff in the public service of Edo State today.
So far, we have been able to identify some of the negative policies of government which have affected the effective performance of the council in the discharge of its duties. It is only logical therefore that we make the following recommendations in the hope that the appropriate authorities in the state would accord them the desired attention and consequent implementation for the good of the arts and culture sector as well as other sectors in dire need of resuscitation in the state.

Recommendations

- a. There should be an urgent programme of rehabilitation of the council. This includes providing the right leadership with the desired vision, drive and determination to succeed. The rehabilitation programme should include organizing the various groups of artists into cooperative partnerships. This would not only protect their social status but also encourage higher standards of artistic creation.
- b. The council should work in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the Community Development and Social Welfare Departments and the mass media in the state so that the implementation of cultural programmes can yield meaningful results.
- c. The arts should be made to form an essential part of the school curriculum from primary, through secondary to the tertiary levels. The mass media, being a unique communication network for the generation and dissemination of information and knowledge should be integrated in the state's cultural policy (Awodiya, 2004). This would make it possible for more detailed and relevant programmes in arts and culture to be disseminated to the people.
- d. A good and conducive office accommodation should be provided for the council's staff. This would allow for meaningful work to be carried out in the council.

- e. Transport is a vital logistic matter necessary for the effective execution of the council's programmes. Government should of necessity provide the council with the required vehicles and other logistics to enable it prosecute its programmes.
- f. There is an urgent need for talented artistes to be recruited to replace those due for retirement in the next few years. Those recruited will help to strengthen the performing troupes, the research, technical and business management sections of the council.
- g. Efforts should be made to replace the obsolete and unserviceable equipment acquired many years ago. These include lighting and sound equipment, costumes, musical instruments and scenic production tools and other materials.
- h. There should be a comprehensive training programme for old and new employees to enable them cope with the challenges of the times.
- i. Special financial provision should be made for research, documentation and publication. Research should be undertaken in all aspects of arts and culture while equal attention should be paid to studies that would determine how best the arts can be improved, what in fact people desire to have and would like to see. Ivie: Nigerian Journal of Arts and Culture should be resuscitated and given its pride of place in the scheme of things.
- j. New arts galleries and craft-shops should be established to serve as "windows" into Edo State. The galleries should not be mere repositories of objects but should be made wide open to the public like cultural meeting places.
- k. The Benin Craft Centre donated by the Nigerian Breweries Plc should be equipped and run as a training centre to meet the yearning and aspiration of the founding fathers.
- l. The council should be encouraged to organize regular stage performances and touring exhibitions to all nooks and crannies of the state as a way of encouraging mass participation in cultural activities.
- m. An appropriate forum should be created whereby art-loving and art-creating members of the public can be brought together for exchange of ideas on how best the arts can be pursued in the state.
- n. Government should as a matter of deliberate policy fund the arts adequately as is the case in many parts of the world. It should in fact make culture an important aspect of the state's economic planning. In Australia, "the arts are supported almost entirely by the government. There is little commitment or support from business and philanthropic groups (Battersby, 1974). In the United States, "the National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities is the central governing body for Federal subsidy to the arts and humanities" (Langley, 1980). Above all, "the New York State Council on Arts ... has remained the nation's best funded State Council". This is not to say that in a developing economy like Nigeria, there should be no private subsidy for the arts. Rather, the private sector should be encouraged to support the arts if it must flourish

in Nigeria. Charles J. Haughey, in his paper, "Art and the Majority" emphasizes "the need to invest far more in the arts than ever before" (1973). To him, "culture is not a matter of spare time and idleness, something for the leisure class, but rather a part of the social product on which the general welfare of a nation emphatically depends". Amadi in her paper "Administration and Development of Culture: the Nigerian Experience" expresses the view that "culture involves a people as a whole and is their guarantee of historical survival (1981). Therefore, "the state has an obligation to adopt a policy or official attitude towards this crucial aspect of the people's life". She recommends that "whatever policy the state carves out must be inscribed in the overall development of the nation and the institutions to execute the policy must be streamlined and fully equipped.". Government must therefore play a pivotal role in cultural policy formulation and implementation. It must see itself as having enormous responsibility in providing the enabling environment and the impetus for meaningful creative work.

- o. Government should take immediate steps to enact appropriate legislations to enforce the provisions of section 10.3.1 of the Nigerian Cultural Policy. The sources of funding identified under the section are consistent with the resolutions of the inter-governmental conference on cultural policies in Africa (Accra, 1975) and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) conference on cultural policies in Mexico (1982) to which Nigeria is a signatory.

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