# The Ligaments of Culture and Development in Nigeria

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**Abstract**   Culture is the totality of ways and manners people live their lives and make sense of their existences. These existences refer to total being to include spiritual, material, intellectual, emotional, environmental and even response to natural occurrences. Every group and society has cultures that constitute frameworks for their lives and behavioral patterns. Cultural factors affect economic behavior and this is usually, in at least four ways; through its impact on organization and production, attitudes towards consumption and work, the ability to create and manage institutions, and the creation of social networks. Hence, the social and economic performance of nations can only be best appreciated and explained against the background of the prevailing cultural domains. This also has bearing with the prevailing differences in subsisting institutions. Cultural trajectories affect policy formulations and implementations and how they drive growth and development. Social Scientists however sometimes conclude that cultures, especially in diversity, *nearly automatically* lead to instability and *less-development,* if not *underdevelopment*. This paper contends that culture is a force, very dynamic, lethal and is a driver of human growth and development. Against this background, this paper will engage issues that serve as undercurrents of the roles of culture in Nigeria's development. The paper will also pragmatically explore the roles and undercurrents in manners that demonstrate how they have driven development in the past and how they could lead to development in the country at present and the future. Culture's development threats and potentials for the nation will be demonstrated and how cultural forces and dynamics could be incorporated into theoretical and empirical models will be shown.

**Keywords**   Culture, Cultural Diversity, National Development, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction and Background

It is a truth today that African cultures are under threat. These cultures are in fact been pushed beyond their limits of tolerance in manners that suggest danger. Some cultures are in fact already surviving at the merging[1]. Unfortunately the time to begin to appreciate and re-appreciate the cultural importance to regional growth is critically now as experiences suggest that the pathways to Nigerian and African development are strategically hidden in the cultures and cultural-political determination and resoluteness of the country and the region[2]. The cultures hold the key to growth, oneness, integration, identity and development ultimately. There is thus a strong interrelationship among culture, growth, progress, development and even national integration[15-18]. The confounding power of cultures to drive growth can never be underestimated even when they are in their traditional forms and isolated let alone when they are appropriated as collectivities in a nation as viable as Nigeria[3]. Unfortunately, these cultures have been largely seen as given, familiar, problematic and unimportant to national growth and development. Even though Nigerians, and many African nations, may not consciously appreciate

this fact, the unprecedented pace and degree of cultural neglect in the nation(s) are unrivalled.

Culture as viable tool of development are under-estimated and not annexed even when the Americans and European Union (EU) are doing everything possible to annex their many cultures for national and regional sustainable development drive. Brazil, India and China (The so called BRIC Nations) as well as South Korea, Indonesia, and Singapore all built their paths to development on traditional values and culture[4]. Interestingly, the BRIC Nations and the Asian Tigers (so called) all started the journey to development with Nigeria but they have since left Nigeria far behind on the race to development. The gap is very wide and is still being widened as the missing link in Nigeria is still not being annexed. What is the missing link? The Culture of people as veritable Social Capital that could be deployed for growth and development and even translated to economic and technological capitals. Culture is a cure-all for growth and development. Nothing is achieved and could be achieved except it is operated within culture.

The Europeans, Americans, BRIC Nations and the Asian Tigers paid considerable attention to their cultural imperatives even in diversity and domesticated developmental trajectories within their cultural domains and environments. They made cultural sense of policies and programmes. Their cultural ethos determined directions for policies and demonstrated the road to popular implementation. It is important to note that it is only proper annexation of culture that could

make national integration and development possible, make ECOWAS Frameworks and goals achievable, drive achievement of Millennium Development goals (MDGs) and move the nation forward in terms of needed growth and development.

## 2. Objective, Methods and Conceptual Issues

### Pragmatic and Theoretical Discourse on Culture: Implications for Nigeria

The objective of this article is to trace the relationships and links between culture and development. A rich historical and normative approach and method were adopted. Global and national as well as more micro trajectories were explored to enrich the issues raised in this article for pragmatic development implications nationally and globally as well as more locally. Although culture has been variously defined, the definition of UNESCO is very apt and useful. According to United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)[5], culture can be defined as the set of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group, encompassing, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of life, value systems, traditions and beliefs. It thus shows and is obvious from above definition that culture is the totality of ways and manners people live their lives and make sense of their existences. It is what determines whether a group of people will be called 'humans' or 'people'. This is because it is culture that orders human and show the way forward for a society. It gives pattern and uniqueness to a people. This is why it is difficult, if not impossible, to refer to animal culture in manners that reflect that of humans.

There are components of culture. These are materiality and non-materiality. Material culture refers to the products that humans create. It demonstrates immense human creativities. That is, the gift, talents and abilities of man to exploit his/her environments to create things necessary for his/her survival. Material aspect of cultures consists of arts and other tangible things/elements for livelihood and security. Automobiles, architecture, food, clothing and physical technologies qualify for material aspect of culture. In the order of tangible cultural determinism, no society can survive without material cultures and there has not been and exception to this. Material cultures' manifestation demonstrate vividly the state of development of the society in question and the mix of their material culture's elements can show their level of seriousness relative to growth and through this it is possible to project their growth pathways and patterns.

The other aspect of culture is the non-material aspect. This is also known as social and organization aspects of culture. It is not less important than material. In fact, the material aspect only manifests the degree of permissibility of social aspect of culture. This is the social action of the society in question. The social aspect of culture is the force and spirit of the material cultures and it propels the direction of growth of a

society forcefully. An examination of a social aspect of culture in any given society can help understand the development pathways of that society. Rights and duties, feelings, behavioral patterns, laws, mores, norms, values, belief systems and religion and other intangible social institutions fall within the frameworks of social aspect of culture. Intangible culture supplies the specialize codes that order human relations seen in any society. A strong link must therefore exist between the tangible/material culture and the social in any society or the society to grow. At is important state that culture is complex and must be seen as such, it determine societal capacity for growth and development, it could diffuse from one society to another, it is dynamic and liable to change, it is relative, it could be transmitted across generation, it is universal yet varies and different from society to society, it is liable to corruption over time if not protected and it is the most sustainable and reliable tool for integration, growth and development.

It must however be noted that culture is a pattern and creates a pattern in any human society. Culture is the epicenter of human action, growth and development. Culture influences perception and this affect how people relate with their environments for development outcomes[6]. In a related manner, MacLean[7] posited that social world and development are created by humans in sports but beyond. Culture is the bearing of every human action and aspiration. It determines what groups fight for to achieve development [8]. A society, region or nation that does not pay sufficient attention to its culture will thus, certainly not grow, never develop and will ultimately extinct. It will be swallowed up within the scheme of things as it will lose its very essence and define character that makes it different for others and that which will drive his growth and development. Poor appreciation and annexation of culture will certainly lead to elusive development. Development efforts without the prism of culture are wasteful discharge of energy, shadow boxing and mindless waste of scarce national and regional resources.

Human existences within cultural frameworks refer to total being to include spiritual, material, intellectual, emotional, environmental and even response to natural occurrences. Every group and society has modal culture that constitutes framework for their lives and behavioral patterns. The importance of culture as policy and growth interface has given rise to concepts and principles like Culturenomics. This refers national and regional element and traits that are unique to traditional and local history, social structure, psychology, belief systems, religion, values, norms, arts and politics that legitimize actions within the local environment and suggest pattern of interactions with outsiders. Cultural factors will therefore certainly affect local, national, regional and overall international relations. Culture affects policy and economic behavior and this is usually, in at least four ways, through its impact on organization and production, attitudes towards consumption and work, the ability to create and manage institutions, and the creation of social networks. Hence, the economic performance of nations and regions

could only be best appreciated and explained against the background of the prevailing cultural domains. This also has bearing with the prevailing differences in subsisting institutions. Cultural trajectories will affect policy formulations and implementations. It will affect how they drive growth and development since it will also affect how people and members of the Community perceive and participate in organization's activities.

Cultural capitals inform job opportunities, relative prices and a host of other economic backdrops that determine growth and development pathways in the region. Since people constitute groups and groups are diverse, cultures are also, myriad and diverse and could have diverse effects on growth and development in the region. It then means that as there are diversity of people and groups, there is diversity of cultures and this is the case in Nigeria. Domains of cultural diversity could be observed in linguistics/language, ethnic, religious, origin, economy, family, health, industrial systems and across all institutions of the society. While social scientists have often argued and are quick to conclude that culture and cultural diversity in a nation *nearly automatically* leads to societal instability and *less-development,* if not *underdevelopment*. Therefore, culture is a force, very dynamic, lethal and an essential as well as an integral part of human growth and development in Nigeria. Cultures give and sustain groups' unique identities, drive innovations and creativities that determine extent of growth and development. In the same and more critical vein, culture and cultural diversity, in Nigeria does not necessarily lead to instability and underdevelopment all the time depending on the peoples' capacity to appreciate the trajectories of culture and cultural diversity and ability to deploy them as viable tools for sustainable national/regional growth. The methodology of this paper was primarily qualitative. It was based on two years of observation of the Nigerian cultural and development domains. It was heuristic and normative to give detailed examination and exploration of the *problematique*.

## 3. Results and Discussion I

### Indigenous Cultural Systems and Development: Observations from Early Nigeria

Indigenous cultural systems were very useful in galvanizing growth and development in the early times. Interestingly, they still hold prospects for contemporary Nigeria. This is more so if their criteria and experiences are annexed for the present and future development of Nigeria. It is possible to consider indigenous cultural systems in Nigeria and Africa prior to colonization, during colonization and immediate post-colonization. It is against this backdrop that observations from early Nigerian history are given in this section for contemporary Nigeria.

Nigeria occupies an Area of 923, 768 square km (356,667 square miles), from the Gulf of Guinea it extends north to the border with Niger Republic. It has a veritable landscape, from the swampy coastal areas and tropical forest belts of the interior, to the mountains and savannah of the north. The climate is hot and humid and rainfall heavy at the coast and gradually decreases inland. The climatic conditions suggest arability and supposed viability of agricultural practices. Nigeria is the sixth largest producer of crude oil in the world and the countries' crude oil is famed as being the easiest to refine. The population of Nigeria is 140, 0003542 million. It is, consequently, the most populous country in Africa, close to 20 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa and is the sub-continent's second largest economy. In the same vein, Nigeria is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world. It is thus, a multi-cultural nation

There are about 500 ethnic groups in Nigeria with very diverse socio-cultural system deeply rooted in ethnic segmentation [see also 17]. The cultural variability in the country is represented through ethnic categorization which collectively forms ethnic plurality, culture multiplicity and ethno-linguistic groupings [see also 15 and 16]. For instance, numbers of ethnic groups in Nigeria is not less than 500. Generally, it is possible to categorized etho-liguistic groups in Nigeria to range 250 to 500. Has multiple as these ethnic and ethno-linguistic groups are however, cultures and ethnic groups in Nigeria are often classified into the three ethnic groups in Nigeria. The three dominant ethnic groups are; the Hausas, the Yorubas and the Igbos respectively in other of population strength. The Hausas are in the Northern part of the country and speak Hausa language the Yorubas are in the Southwestern part and speak Yoruba language while the Igbos are in the Southeastern part and speak Igbo language.

The dominance of these three ethnic groups however does not diminish the significance of these other ethnic groups. In fact most people in Nigeria prefer to trace their root and origin to less dominant classification depending on the reason for ethnic appropriation (ethnic instrumentalities). It is common to see an individual describe him/herself in Nigeria as Ekiti man/woman instead of Yoruba while an Igbo person may prefer to describe self as Mbaise rather than Igbo. Language, trough words mobilization, is the avenue through which the culture move and meanings are made and communicate. Nigeria, Like in other related domains, language is a very key cultural identical. This is why culture is sometime categorized along language groups. All the ethnic and language groupings in the country have deep rooted traditional background and established oral traditions in proverbs. They communicate through proverbs when serious issues are to be discussed and meaning are to be made and instructions passed with non-controversial implications. All these ethnic groups and ethno-linguistic groups in Nigeria have strong affinity for and usage of proverbs. Proverbs form the core component of the language and general communication in the country just as in other parts of Africa especially the Sub-Sahara.

These cultural backgrounds affected the cultural and political systems adopted by the people and it determined their conception and approaches to development. The groups defined development, move towards development and were developed in their own right to the extent that their needs are

met and they related with others on the basis of co-equals and mutual benefits in social relations. For instance, the Igbo culture was patterned along gerontocracy and decentraliza-tion/acephalous arrangements. Decisions were taken in a village square setting in manners that accommodated all. Decisions were taken democratically and immediate and distant environments were exploited for the common good. For the Yorubas of the west, the political system was mon-archical and structured with consultative mechanisms in-built. The decisions for the communities were taken after due consultation with the *Oye Mesis* in a political system that has come to be known in Yoruba historiography as the Oba-in-Council. Decisions are never taken unilaterally and the common good and efforts are articulated for group de-velopment. The Oba *Alaafin* of *Oyo*. In related version, the Hausas of the Northern part practiced Emirate system that was very and sharply hierarchical. Power and authority flowed from the top (from the Emir) and followers were expected to follow. This was contrary to what obtained in the east where power and authority were devolved and in the east with constitutional monarchy.

These political systems ultimately drove growth and de-velopment in these societies. Social thoughts, sayings and proverbs that emerged in these societies also influenced growth and development in the societies in unique ways. Socio-cultural thoughts helped the indigenous societies to develop theories and attitudes as well as actions that con-tributed to their growth. Such thoughts are; *ise logun ise* (work is the antidote of poverty)*, igba ara la bura, enikan ki bu sango lerun* (It at youthful and agile age that one can work and contribute to growth)*, agbajowo lafi soya* (It is in unity and integration that we can benefit and develop. This has implication for regional integration) and *ete ni gbehin imele* (A lazy person will be put to shame) helped the growth and attitude to work and development of the people. A proverbial song among the Yorubas of Southwestern Nigeria further shows the ethics of hard work as important values for de-velopment of a people and society:

> *Ole alapa ma sise*
> *Ole da so iya bora sun,*
> *Enito bi ole ko romobi*
> *Ewa waye ole o ose*
> Interpretation:
> Lazy person with hands yet cannot work
> The lazy person sleeps when he is to be at work
> The person that gives birth to a lazy person is childless
> Come and see the shame of a lazy person. It is a shame

## 4. Results and Discussion II

### Globalization and the Cultural Spaces: The Sensitive Embeddedness

Not many concepts and practices are as sensitive and passionately discussed as globalization. Academics and policy makers as well as activists across spectrums have had one reason or the other to engage globalization. This is due to the impact of globalization on people and its predictive power relative to growth and development. While these impacts are sometimes positive, they are also sometimes negative. Globalization is the increasing interaction of peo-ple, things and nations across time and space. It is the in-crease in rate of interaction within the framework of extreme reduction in time and space distanciation. Whether inten-tionally or unintentionally, nations, regions and cultures relate across the world in contemporary terms and time and share in the consequences of such interactions. The 'third world economies and cultures interact with those of 'first' and 'second worlds' and vice versa with far reaching con-sequences. Exchanged and unequally yoked together in fast and easy interactions in manners that suggested win-ners-takes-all.

Cultural, economic, political, religious, psychological and technological capitals are exchanged across time and space. Globalization is propelled and made possible by technolo-gies and the technologies sometimes take control of global interactions away from nations and people especially the weak ones in terms of political economy and technology. Today, decision to participate in globalization is taken on behalf of nations by the global super powers who decide the nature and consequences of globalization. Nations and their people are thus compelled to be mere actors in globalization as the 'developed nations' select the *dramatis personae* and allocate roles for the ultimate gains of the 'developed na-tions'. Although it is commonly stated that the process of globalization is for interconnectedness of sovereign nations through trade, capital, technological and cultural flows for common good, this also depend on the capacity to appropri-ate advantages and these capacities are often dictated from the 'West' and mostly lacking in the 'developing nations' especially Nigeria and Africa in general.

The 'West' thus manufacture globalization and its trajec-tories/ancillaries for their good while the 'developing nations' only consume the consequences helplessly. In relation to culture, globalization could have and mostly have two con-tradictory, opposing and dialectical consequences. Global-ization could have either centrifugal or centripetal conse-quences on the culture of a people depending on the nature and dynamics of relationship between local and global forces that moderate cultural globalization. The nature and strength of these forces will determine the situation and future of the cultural and the specific cultural ethos in question. Thus, it is possible for globalization to melt and converge cultures and lead to sameness and a global culture. At the same time it could lead to and reinforce cultural divergence and reinforce differences. The implications of the background issues found deep and practical expressions in the indigenous cultural patterns and the social institutions.

As the influence of globalization continue to be interro-gated, the two major theoretical schools espoused above rage. For cultural differentialism, it is opined that it is impossible for cultures to be harmonized and homogenized. This is predicated on the assumption that peoples' cultures are en-during, represents identities that are unique, needed for

subjective self-identification, important intergenerational significance, it total and tied strongly to race and religion. These elements give civilization and culture core impetus that are not amenable to homogenization even though they do change. Within this tradition, memories of being, identity and relevance are located within cultures just as the ethno-history and the future linked to the present and lived in the past are codified in the culture of a people. Language and dialects demonstrate these as people deploy their mother and local tongue issues central to their survival are at stake.

In societies in Nigeria where ancestral worships and libations are still held dear, cultures are vehicles through which the living relates with the important dead to give meanings to activities and action. It thus becomes unlikely that cultures could be homogenized. At best, cultures will have and begin to compete and become more and increasingly cosmopolitan. On the other hand, an opposing theoretical tradition subsists. This is the Cultural Convergence orientation. According to this tradition, globalization leads and has the unending capacity to increase cultural sameness throughout a nation and the world at large. Cultures against this backdrop are liable to change, whether gradually or drastically, as a result of continue exposure to cultures at the 'other side'. Once these exposures are made possible, it is inevitable that, as sponge attracts water or soap, cultures will attract elements of one another and change in form and significant to the semblance of dominant ones exposed to in many ways. This has been constantly referred to as 'cultural assimilation' as already experienced in the French Colonies during colonialism. Globalization thus set the stage and pace for second and modern as well as post-modern cultural colonization through cultural imperialism. At the global and regional levels, implication of this theoretical orientation is observable in the ascendancy of fast food consumption, McDonaldization, family values at a flux[9], neo-liberal democracy and capitalism in Nigeria, West Africa and Africa as propelled forcefully from the Western World of America and Europe through globalization. According to Cook[10] culture moves internationally and transnationally and the consequence of this is a cosmopolitan culture as enabled by globalization.

Many things are deniable today but not that globalization is having profound effect on Nigeria and its cultures whether in centrifugal terms and centripetal terms. These effects have both positive and negative forces and one could be more than the other depending on which side of the divide you are. Globalization is propelled and driving with utmost specificities by the mass media. The Mass Media today turn out targeted information with profound intended and unintended outcomes. The unmitigated exposure to foreign cultures through the mass media has come to be known as the CNN Effect resonating the huge influence of the popular Cable Network News with base in the United States of America as the original epicenter of globalization in the contemporary terms. The mass media, people today are exposed to cultural ideals and values alien to their societies and are *encouraged* or *forced* of *lured* to internalize such values even when in conflict with dominant cultures. International stations are many today and they enter peoples' homes and mentalities as well as cultures through satellite technologies as physical barriers to information are broken. It does not take much to watch stations like CNN, BBC, Sky News, Channel O, MTV Base, Super Sport, Sky Sport, Hollywood and Bollywood with profound homogenizing and cosmopolitanism impacts on cultures. These could be seen in the areas of fashion, taste, consumptions and individualization[11] across the world whether in the centre of periphery or Metropoles and satellites.

Cultural boundaries today are very blurred within this framework and thresholds of cultures increasingly become fragile. Even media products like Nollywood and Africa Magic that are supposed to propagate local cultures are laced with foreign contents in manners that made adoption of foreign cultures easy and normal. Since cultural ethoses are not static and dynamic, even though globalization can breed cultural divergence, the potentialities of convergence are rife. There is hardly any nation today that could be described as autarchic as nations' boundaries are now only virtual and penetrable through technologies. Effect of these cultural penetrations as enabled by technologies could be observed in the 21st Century wave of the Arab Revolutions that swept through the North Africa and Middle East. Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Iran for example were not spared and many rulers who have had firm grip of their nations for decades were consumed[2]. Cultural and religious elements sustained these rulers for that long but these cultural and religious elements were challenged and crumbled, largely, by foreign cultural incursions enabled by Information Communications Technologies (ICTs) especially internet and mobile phones (emails, social networks platforms like face book and twitter, Short Messages [SMS] and phone calls).

# 5. Conclusions

This article has attempted the exposition of the role of culture and cultural diversity in national growth and development in Nigeria. Related issues have been raised with critical importance for regional growth. Implications of theoretical and pragmatic discourse as well as globalization were particularly attempted. It has been observed that people generally, and Nigerians in particular, have not demonstrated enough capacities to interrogate cultural elements prior to adoption this is eroding the culture and growth space in the region. People see in part and adopt in full to the detriment of themselves and the indigenous cultural systems. Policies and development efforts are being adopted without sufficient recourse to traditional and indigenous cultural capitals that will determine policy outcomes ultimately in the nation [see also 12, 13 and 14]. Continental, regional and policy are designed and implemented within generalized frameworks and template largely to fit global mindsets even when they are not support by local and indigenous cultural infrastructures to sustain such policies and changes necessary for

national development. Although national policies need to be global compliant, local cultural dictates must be factored into the growth policy and growth equation. Cultures, indigenous values and social thoughts in the region must be sufficiently appreciated and interrogated for policies and actions to support and drive change. Cultures and indigenous values must evolve bottom-up policies and approaches to growth and development in the country.

Every culture in Nigeria has unique diets, mode of dressing, mode of production, language, greetings, marriage, mode of socialization, political systems that could be annexed for development. In fact, everything is unique from one culture to the other but modal systems could be discovered and appropriated for national development. As already shown above, historical accounts reveal that these cultural systems were effective and galvanized sustainable development and could still be useful in contemporary Nigeria. These political systems were developed in tandem with prevailing socio-cultural environments and not mindlessly taken from without. This sustained the groups and cultures and put them of the path to sustained growth and development. The physical and cultural environments of these groups specified how intelligently they were to exploit their environment and meet their needs and so they did objective. It is possible to say these people developed and their developments were sustainable. They lived within and related on the point of strength with their external neighbors.

In contradistinction, in contemporary Nigeria, families (nuclear ascendancy), mass media (foreign technology and contents dominance), economy (capitalism and bureaucracy), religion (Christianity and Islam), political system (Neo-Liberal democracy) are all laced with globalization imposed trajectories. Although it is possible to argue that local elements subsist, the subsistence is at the margins mostly. Cultures in Nigeria take the forms of foreign ones easily with impunity while they hardly give any. Cultural elements at 'home' are commonly portrayed as evil, atavistic and archaic while foreign ones are presented and accepted as the 'normal, good and desirable'. Even values like love, hard work, honesty, bravery, care, extended brotherliness and filiations are now negatively rationalized as individualism and profit concerns take the center stage as imported through globalization. The time to factor indigenous culture trajectories into growth and development efforts in Nigeria is thus now!

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