Culture and the Challenges of Development in Africa: Towards A Hybridization of Traditional and Modern Values

(Pp 288-297)

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Abstract
Development is a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, altitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty. However, the paper argues that the cultural dimension is a long-neglected aspect of development; the challenge, therefore, lies in fostering a synergistic development between science and technology and cultural values. What is essential is how to take culture into account both scientifically (methods and data) and practically. Because people do not commit themselves to a development undertaking unless that undertaking corresponds to their deeply felt needs, people should be able to derive the means and motivation for their development; the paper further stressed. This paper recommends a renaissance of applied cultural studies through the consolidation and generation of knowledge about (1) how cultural diversity affects what people do and want; (2) how cultural factor interact with other variables in the "production" of development, good or bad; and (3) how culture itself is affected by various kinds of development and other factors.

Keywords: development, culture, modernity, traditional, challenge, compatibility, process etc

Introduction

Scholars in Africa have until the late 1980s regarded culture as the main impediment to development in Africa. According to Modo (1998) this was because the concept of culture had not been properly conceptualized, understood and utilized in analyzing the processes of development in the continent. In the 1950s and 1960s, development was seen essentially as an economic phenomenon. The belief was that improvements in overall per-capital Gross National Product (GNP) would pass down to the masses in the form of jobs and other economic opportunities or create the necessary conditions for the wider distribution of the economic and social benefits of growth (Onokerhoraye, 1985). But as it turned out, the opposite has remained the case.

The bane of development programmes in most under developed countries of the world, particularly Africa, is the lack of understanding of the peoples need, ignorance of the historical, environmental and socio-cultural experiences of the people. Thus, the anthropological concept of development is that which is viewed from the people's needs and aspirations which are amply reflected in their norms and values. Since development is an adaptive institutional procedure, the indicators introduced should not be modeled against any external influence but on parameters relevant to the goals of the society in question (Andah and Bolarinwa, 1994).

Andah and Bolarinwa (1994) further noted that the cultural milieu of a people is a major factor in the development process of that society. The totality of values, norms, attributes and beliefs of a society shapes that society's social, economic, political organization and inculcate a general feeling towards development and related issues.

Nyerere (1992); Andah and Bolarinwa (1994) examined development from the cultural perspective. They viewed culture as the sum total of values, beliefs, attitudes, customs and pattern of behaviours in a given society as vital pillar of social and economic transformation. They alluded to fact that those theories of development which discount the importance of cultural factors have shown themselves liable to breed indifference, alienation and social discord.

Theoretical framework

The reasons for the interest in formulating theories of development include among others; the need to find solutions to the economic underdevelopment of developing nations, the need to establish unity in the developing nations

and the need to enable them attain economic self-sufficiency (Chodack, 1973).

A persistent theme in the study of modernization has been the treatment of "modern" and "traditional" cultures as polar types. In this way, modernization becomes a problem of changing traditional societies into modern ones. Lerner (1968) defines modernization as the process of social change whereby less developed societies acquire the characteristics common to developed societies. For him, development is seen as an economic component of modernization. Parson (1989) in his analysis of social systems pointed out that it is the cultural systems that control the other aspects of society. Parson held that any explanation of social transformation in any society would of necessity consider changes occurring at "cultural level". That development of sophisticated culture, which western society represents, is a prerequisite for modernization he observed.

As rightly noted by Offiong (1980), those who espouse the theory of modernization can be identified by their almost tenacious addiction to the concept "modern" and its permutations and by categories such as "institutional differentiations" "development", "nation-building", "economic growth", "advanced industrial societies", "westernized, "backward", "primitive", "tribal", "detribalized", and many more.

Thus according to modernization theory, a society is developed when traditional values are relegated to the background and replaced by modern values. Modernization theory has been variously criticized as largely ethnocentric, eurocentric and imperialistic. The displacement of traditional values and institutions by modern ones does not in anyway help development in Africa, where support from kinship groups still exist and provide social and material support. The cultural heritage of a people is very crucial in the processes of her development. What modernization theorists most often end up with is in eventuating ethnocentric practical recipes which admonish the poor societies to imitate them all the way and would acquire a sudden leap into the twentieth century.

As Andah (1992) argues, the mere transfer of supposedly sophisticated international technology designed for altogether dissimilar circumstances, has so far resulted in a dualistic situation whereby growth is concentrated in a relatively small modern sector but does not percolate through to the rest of the economy especially the rural sector. It has had the harmful effects of

displacing previously existing and still relevant structures without serving as an adequate cultural substitute. For Andah, the crucial task of anthropology in Africa and by extension, the blackworld or even the so-called Third World (but in fact, the first world) today, is that of reconciling, the old and the new, not replacing the old values, institutions and beliefs with new imperialist ones as most western social scientists implicitly or explicitly predicate in their studies (Andah, 1988).

Culture

The last decade marked a turning point in acknowledging the importance of culture in the development process. Since the beginning of the 1970s a number of voices at UNESCO have been raised regularly that stressed the relevance of the cultural factor in the social, economic and political evolution of contemporary societies. Nonetheless, according to Etounga-Manguelle (1998), in Africa, this awareness seemed to focus on reasserting cultural identify, which Africans, rightly or wrongly, believed was really threatened by the emphasis on purely economic development.

How broad should this definition of culture be? From a narrow perspective, culture can be defined as "… that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Scupin, 2006). But as development practitioners, were must adopt a broader perspective, even if it is one in which the boundaries are still vague and the constituent parts rather ill-defined.

> [culture] comprises a people's technology, its manners and customs, its religious beliefs and organizations, its systems of valuation whether expressed or implicit. If the people in question constitutes a highly developed modern nation, its social organization and its economy are usually excluded from the concept of culture and considered separately, although the reciprocal influence of social-economic and cultural factors are of course taken into account. When the word is used in (this) larger sense, the extent of its reference include a people's art and thought but only as one element among others.

The international community formally adapted this view of culture in the UNESCO-sponsored definition in the declaration of MONDIACULT:

> Culture...is … the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only arts and letters but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human beings, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

Every region has cultural manifestations that strike deep responsive chords in the people. This occurs partly because they draw upon an authentic heritage that helps define the shared image of self and society that creates a collectivity. As Serageldin (1998) rightly noted, all these points converge in the need to put "cultural identity" at the center of the development paradigm that should guide our actions.

Each society has its own distinctive system of values that constitute an important part of its culture. A society or community needs to harness and maximize the resourcefulness of its culture in a dynamic manner to develop harmoniously (Salim, 1998). Salim further argued that it is important, however, to stress that we live in an interdependent world within which each society or culture must strive to keep pace with scientific and technological progress. The challenge, he asserted, lies in determining the way and means of fostering a synergistic development between science and technology, on the one hand and cultural values, on the other. Technology does have cultural implications and when introducing new technology, due consideration should accordingly be given to the cultural values inherent in a particular society. We are all too familiar with development projects that have failed because they were super-imposed on a cultural environment that was not conducive and therefore could not enlist the support of the people concerned.

Development
Capitalist economists see development as economic growth measured in aggregate terms of growth in per capital income, Gross National Product (GNP), Gross Product (GP) and so on (Goulet, 1975) to the neglect of the individuals involved in production growth in terms of attitudinal, institutional and technological changes which the people must undergo to produce wealth (Lewis, 1975). From the capitalist economists' conception of development in the 1950s and 1960s, development was seen as an economic phenomenon. However, the experience of a number of developing countries in these periods, indicate that the narrow economic conception of development was inappropriate as such, there was the need for a redefinition of the term

(Mabogunje, 1980; Ayida, 1987; Tom 1991 and Onokerhoraye and Okafor, 1994).

As observed by Salim (1998), development is a global undertaking with multiple dimensions – economic, social and cultural; that influence one another. He argued that the cultural dimension is a long-neglected aspect of development. The challenge, therefore, lies in fostering a synergistic development between science and technology and cultural values. For him, people do not commit itself to a development undertaking unless that undertaking corresponds to its deeply felt needs. People should be able to derive the means and motivation for their development from their own cultural roots, he however noted.

Since African culture is universally acknowledge and appreciated and since Africa is committed to its cultural heritage and values, the best course to aim at, is a world in which specific cultures can develop yet in which the specific and the universal can merge and be mutually strengthened and enriched. Africa itself must synthesize these values to ensure humane and equitable development (Salim, 1998).

Examples abound all over Africa where many development projects have failed mainly because social analysts who understood the culture of the people were left out. Cernea (1991) said the problem is mainly due to engineering bias. This happens when an overwhelming concern to complete the civil construction blinds planners to the social needs of resettled people. For example, too many projects have provided for new houses, roads and water without account being taken of how people will earn a living at the new group site if the resettled village does not have farming land available around the new settlement. Examples of such faulty projects in Africa due to lack of cultural concern by the handlers include the Manantali Dam in Mali (some 10,000 people were displaced), Mangboto in Togo (12,000 people were displaced) and the Baardheere Dam project in Somalis Juba river.

Both Manantali and Mangboto projects under-estimated both the needs and the costs of resettlement. In the Italian consulting companies' design of Baardheere Dam project, there was no mention of what would happen to the significant number of farmers and other inhabitants who would be forced to move by reservoir submergence (Cernea, 1991:80).

This paper, therefore, aims at advancing the culture research techniques in the design and implementation of development programmes in Africa. It further shows that such cultural techniques have the advantage because it places the people first in development; thereby making the people active participants in the design and implementation of projects that are meant to benefit them. The technique also enables the people to use resources within to make innovations. Pitt (1976) calls the techniques "development from" below.

Culture and Development: A Conceptual Construct
A clear understanding of the relationships between culture and development will therefore bring about an appreciation of the fact that any step towards development should of necessity start with the examination of the people's popular culture and the values inherent therein, for these inform people's choices in life and their general well-being. Bashir (1991) contended that development should be seen as the actualization and popularization of these values either collectively or individually. It is obvious from the foregoing that any development process which is based on the values of an alien culture is bound to be problematic, to say the least.

Therefore, in Africa for a long time the balance swung between two visions of the continent defended by two opposing camps. The first group held that Africa is the land of traditions. The champions of this view according to Etounga-Manguelle (1998) believed that the continent will definitely lose her soul if she renounces the unique cultural features that set her apart, that we jeopardized daily through the intrusion of modern uses and behaviours built on values alien to the people. The second opposed the first in that it brought together people, although, far fewer than the first group who strongly believed that a constructive breakdown that would bring about a dynamic realignment of tradition and modernity, was of prime importance even though some of them were obsessed by a growing doubt about this. Were these opposite visions portraying a modern version of the famous tradition versus modern conflict? Etounga-Manguelle (1998) conjectured. Not necessarily he sighed.

Culture is by its essence, the foundation on which all societies build and as such, the foundation of the prevailing social order. Therefore, none of the parties involved wanted to question the precarious balance of these societies, which were traumatized by colonialism and living on the fringe of an economy whose philosophical assumptions (the role of the self, the destiny of

human beings to dominate and transform in the world), these societies did not share.

On the African continent, every conceivable proposal, idea and means to find the appropriate solutions to the development issues was tackled. It became clear that it was of primary importance to question anew the basic values particularly that of culture.

Central to the process of socio-economic development is culture. As has been said earlier, if a people's culture determines their values, norms and general world view, then the role of culture in development cannot be overemphasized (Bashir, 1998)). Development is therefore the realization of the full potentials of that society as dictated by it values. The expression "popular culture" is carefully used here to depict peoples' culture as against the narrow-based elite culture which, in official circles, is often considered as national culture. The more indigenously based such culture is, the better for the society in achieving and sustaining a high tempo of development.

Cultural Approach to Development
The most threatening factor to the existence of countries in Africa is western cultural imperialism in the name of globalization. Faced with the British cultural onslaught which would have perpetuated backwardness of Germany in the 19ᵗʰ century, Bismarch sensitized his fellow Germans. As Bashir (1991) observed, a strong sense of national pride was developed among Germans. They came all out to protect the cultural and hence, the political, economic and social interests of Germany. Their production goals were geared towards meeting the values and consumption patterns of Germans and not what Britain wanted. Thus Germans looked inwards to develop themselves as their cultural milieu became the pivot.

While this was happening in Germany, a similar step was being taken by the Japanese during the Takugowa regime. Here, a conscious political step was taken to ensure that external cultural influences did not thrive. Till date, the Japanese have maintained this cultural approach to their development. In China, the Communist Party under the leadership of Chairman Mao-Ise – Tung took similar initiatives to launch a cultural revolution. In a similar token, Presidents Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkramah encouraged Tanzanians and Ghanaians respectively to rally round their culture as catalyst for their development.

Conclusion

The debate on the compatibility between cultural values and technological development is also directly linked to the issue of the compatibility between traditional and modern values. Some advocates of the latter contend that cultural values and traditions are obstacles to modernization. Rather, experiences in development, as in the case of Japan, clearly demonstrate that traditional cultural values and modernism are compatible and that a people can, certainly, achieve socio-economic development in harmony with their beliefs and cultural values.

Africa is as committed to modernity as it is to its cultural heritage and values. Salim (1998) argued that it cannot afford to replace its own cultural values by some so-called world culture to whose elaboration, Africa was not given opportunity to contribute. Is it wise or indeed advisable for the world to share one and the same culture? Would a uniform culture not stifle creativity and genius and thus hinder human progress? Salim questions.

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