RELIGION AND CULTURE AS AGENTS OF CHANGE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Religion and Culture permeates the life of every human being as well as every society throughout the world. Every religion and culture has norms, values and acceptable standards reflected in its doctrines and ways of life. By inculcating in adherents and members of the society these norms and values, religion and culture are expected to act as agents for sustainable development in Nigeria. In-spite of this, Nigeria is facing problems of underdevelopment that are evidenced in the educational sector, social, political and economic deterioration. This paper therefore seeks to discover the reason for the lack of development and look at the various roles religion and culture can play in the sustainable development of Nigeria. The paper adopted phenomenological approach and discovered that, vices like corruption and materialism contributes largely to this underdevelopment and that religion and culture can play cardinal roles in growth of our society for sustainable development. The paper recommends that Religious leaders, Traditional rulers, Custodians of morality and Government at all levels should not isolate religion and culture to the background since the two could be found in every strata of the society.

Keywords: Religion, Culture, Sustainable, Development, Nigeria.

Introduction
Nigeria is a blessed country judging from its abundant human and natural resources. Unfortunately and ironically, it has remained one of the least developed countries in the world while poverty has continued to strike the majority of its teeming masses. A lot of factors have been discovered to be responsible for the parlous state of the nation's underdevelopment with effects on the citizenry. Religion in Nigeria so permeates life in the traditional society that there is hardly any aspect of life that is not in one way or another influenced by religions. That was why Mbiti (1975) opines

that: "There is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non- religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life."   As such, every society has its own religious systems in which people live, more and have their being. The individual naturally grows up in this system and simply assimilates the system (Mbiti 1970).

On the other hand, culture according to Mbiti (1970) is not stagnant, it evolves, advances, and grows just like any living organism because it is the fabric with which life is woven. These developments allow for the inclusion of plural views of the world of culture. Culture can be linked to the wisdom of the ages, of saints, martyrs, philosophers, theologians, and economists, something to be studied and discussed. From the discussions perennial truth might be mined for guidance in modern living. Indeed, what some claim as authentic culture may be no more than a hybridization of cultures.

Since religions and culture occupies such as important place in the lives of individual Nigerian citizens, how religion is practiced and culture lived would surely bring sustainable development in Nigeria. However, in-spite of this situation, the real life of its citizenry is far from that. Nigerians belonging to the different religions are often set at each other's throat, resulting in religious violence against their cultural ethics. How is the problem to be resolved for sustainable development in Nigeria? The task of this paper is to examine the issue of "Religion and culture as Agents of change for Sustainable Development in Nigeria." The phenomenological method was employed in conducting the research.

The Concepts "Religion, culture and Sustainable Development"
Religion
Ugwu (2002) stated that a definition of religion that would include every aspect of religion both past and present is really difficult to find. Again, Agha (2012) posited that religion has been defined in various ways and some scholars have gone a step further to classify the definitions according to various schools of thought. As a result of this, different disciplines have defined religion according to their world view. In this regard, religion could be defined as a total outlook on life and contact based on a system of beliefs or convictions that a Supreme Being exist as the source of all that is (Mason, 1996). For Thouless (1961) religion is the belief in an ever living

God, that is in a divine mind and will ruling the universe and holding moral relations with mankind.

Durkheim in Scharf (1970) said that religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a church all those who adhere to them. Idowu (1973) asserted that the term religion came from European word. It refers to the transcendental reality of faith, the inner reality of faith, rituals and ceremonies through which the adherents communicate with the Deity.

Okwueze (2003) opined that religion is a means of regulating a pattern of life of a group of people, which also embraces experience, beliefs and knowledge of man that helps him to understand himself in relation to others, his social, physical and metaphysical worlds. Lastly, Gbenda (2006) saw religion as man's experience, awareness, attitude, recognition, conception, and understanding of the experience of the deity or the multiplicity of spiritual beings and his interaction with them. Nigeria as a pluralistic state is also religiously diversified and as such, there is that need to make a distinction between a prophetic religion and a mystical religion. A prophetic religion is one that lays claim to the effect that God has made some revelation of truth regarding himself, and this religion now considers itself the custodian and messenger of these truths. Thus, the prophetic religion sees its mission as one of being the only authentic interpreter and communicator of this message, which is included to be passed to the whole human race.

One characteristic that is especially peculiar to the prophetic religion is that it takes upon itself some responsibility of shaping and forming the society. Further, it embarks on programmes of social justice to ensure that the rights of other members of the society are respected. Moreso, there are "open" and "close" religion. An "open" religion is one that allows room for self-criticism in its constitution. While the "closed" religion, on the contrary, leaves no room for any criticism whatsoever. Any criticism leveled at this type of religion is sure to result in some kind of disorder. In this paper, the Prophetic religion with the responsibility of shaping and forming the society for sustainable development is the type sought for.

Culture

According to Udu (2002) the term culture is broader. For human beings to build houses, cultivate farms, construct bridges, dams or electricity generating plants, provide qualitative formal education, manage successful businesses, control population growth, prevent or cure sicknesses and diseases, ensure social trust, good governance, law and order, they need an established albert critically receptive body of ideas and beliefs, designs, techniques and methodologies, rules and regulations which is culture. But for culture, with globalization, information and communication technology, men would have lost all knowledge of even the basic means of survival such that within a short time the entire species would disappear forever. Having stressed the need for culture, Ayandele (2005) sees culture as what man interposes between himself and his environment in order to ensure his security and survival. Ukeje (1992) sees culture as the totality of people's ways of life as deduced form material and non-material aspects of their lives such as clothing, values, beliefs, thoughts, feelings and customs. The word culture is so rich and all-encompassing that both sociologists and anthropologists have defined in multifarious ways.

Adamson (1972) describes cultures as the integral system of learned behaviour patterns which are the characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance. In other words, culture does not come from human genes, but rather it is learnt and taught. This bears with the etymology of the word culture as colere, which means 'to cultivate' or 'to practice." The human person is therefore the author and architect of culture. He does not participate passively in the shaping and transmitting of culture, it is an active participation. Culture in this work will show its contributions to peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Sustainable Development

In an attempt to define sustainable development, some scholars have focused on various aspects of sustainable development. Sustainable development basically refers to meeting the need of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations. According to Human Development Report (1991) sustainable development is that development that is participatory and people centered, where men, women; and children must be the center of attention with development woven around people, not people on development. This shows that development must be participatory, that is, it must involve local people in decision that

affect their lives which must improve healthcare, education, and social wellbeing.

According to Ibe (2003), it is a form of development that enables nature's gifts to be used without resulting in overexploitation. Ntamu, Abia, Edinyang and Eneji (2014) sees it as a process of and ideologies where national government implement and develop policies and programme that are lasting and continuous which are beneficial to the present generation while still being useful to the generation yet-unborn. Thus, sustainable development centers on the ambitious agenda that aims to end poverty promote prosperity and protect the environment. Sustainable Development in this paper will be viewed from the perspectives of Religion and Culture as agents for its practicability in Nigeria.

Causes of Underdevelopment in Nigerian

According to Seleb and Madori (2013) the most common cause of underdevelopment in a country is lack of education. There are other causes as well, such as foreign ownership of the country resources, but education is the most important. Other causes of underdevelopment in Nigeria include the following:

(i) **Political Factors:** These include political instabilities, political god. Fatherism and political corruption.

(ii) **Corruption:** This includes embezzlement of funds meant for development projects.

(iii) **Lack of Continuity of Projects:** Nigerian government lacks the will of continuing started by other administration (s) and this hinders development to an extent.

(iv) **Security Challenges:** Problems associated with insecurity has been combating the development of Nigeria as a nation. Investment thrives in a secured environment. Problems such as terrorism, kidnapping, cyber-crime, financial fraud etcetera scare investors away.

(v) **Poor economy:** Poverty is a major problem confronting the continent of African in general and Nigeria in particular. Nigeria's economy has been rated as one of the poorest in the world which has deeply reflected in downward trend of science and technology, trade and commerce. Once the level of economy of any country flourishers, the level of development will increase.

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(vi)   **Civil Unrest:** Once there is civil unrest in one past of the country, it will affect the remaining part and this will hamper development.

(vii)   **Lack of Steady Power Supply:** Problem of electricity is unique with underdevelopment in Nigeria. Most businesses need electric supply to operate. The shortage of this basic amenity affects production in such areas of businesses. Most people and industries that rely on the use of generators get frustrated with the cost of purchasing fuel diesel for their production. The effect of this on the economy is the discouragement of medium/small scale businesses and indigenous entrepreneurship.

Religious Consciousness and Cultural Logic as Agents for Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

Religious Consciousness

The basic trait of African societies and Nigeria in particular is high religious consciousness. This reality is expressed in a complexity of rituals and symbols which together pervade the entire field of human existence. Referring to this religious consciousness of Africans, Mbiti (1960) stated thus: it is religion, more than anything else, which colours their understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in the universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe. That is the philosophical understanding behind African myths, customs, traditions, beliefs, morals, actions and social relationships. In other words, religion has a lot of influence on Nigerians and Africans as a whole.

In recognition of this, Nigerian government has always recognized the importance of religion in her educational policies. For instance, the first government policy that recognized the importance of religious training and moral instruction was the 1925 Memorandum on Education in British colonial territories (Fafunwa, 1974). According to Fafunwa, number three of the twelve memoranda states that "Religious training and moral instruction should be regarded as fundamental to the development of a sound education and should be accorded complete equality with secular subjects." Thus, religious consciousness in Nigeria is a factor for peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Cultural Logic

In order to re-establish social solidarity in war-affected communities, a key step would be to find a way for members of these communities to "re-inform" themselves with a cultural logic that emphasizes sharing and equitable resource distribution. This, in effect, means emphasizing the importance of reviving progressive cultural attitudes and values that can foster a climate within which can flourish. An integral part of the process of achieving positive peace is the need to promote social solidarity. In an important sense, peace is not just the absence of violence, but the presence of social solidarity. Achieving social solidarity means that members of the society once again begin to recognize each other as fellow human beings and being to share a concern in the common welfare and wellbeing of each other. Social solidarity makes sense because only by ensuring the security, safety and wellbeing of other people can people hope to secure our own security, safety and wellbeing. Of course, to emphasize the need to foster social solidarity is to recognize the inter-connectedness of each human being.

According to (UN, 1999) culture in development means actions that foster a culture through education, to the promotion of sustainable economic and social development, promotion of respect for all human rights to ensuring equality between women and men, democratic participation, understanding, tolerance and solidarity, support of participatory communication and the free-flow of information and knowledge to promote international peace and security.

Therefore, if culture is placed at the heart of our strategies, it is a condition for sustainable development, and a powerful driving factor for its achievement. As Udo (2004) noted, it is practically impossible to pursue development in any sphere of human experience without thinking and acting culture. This is partly responsible for the disconnection between culture and development in Nigeria. As many cities today use cultural heritage and cultural events and institutions to improve their image, stimulate urban development and attract visitors as well as investment to their economies, if Nigeria will adhere to these measures, the country will remain the giant of Africa and also on the global success story of development.

Conclusion

Nigeria has over the years lacked peace and consequently economic growth which are important for sustainable development. Although there are many factors inhibiting the contribution of religion and culture to peace and development in Nigeria, they are still important agents for sustainable development. This is so because there are a good number of Nigerians identifying themselves with religions and cultural groups that abound in the country. On the other way round, in Nigeria there are indigenous traditions for peace building which can teach us a lot about healing and reconciliation, and create the basis for re-establishing social solidarity. Therefore, what is required is to find a way to combine the best lessons that tradition through culture can offer with progressive modern norms and standards for the protection of human rights. To enable culture and religion to begin to play a significant role in the reconstruction of Nigeria,it will be necessary to establish education and training programmes for government officials, civil society actors and other citizens. Therefore, all players in the polity and the economy should utilize religious- cultural settings for peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

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