

**CONSERVATION OF THE DIVERSITY  
OF  
CULTURAL EXPRESSION  
FOR  
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
A  
PAPER PRESENTED BY  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria is located in West Africa, just the north of equator. The 1914 political amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by Lord Lugard of Great Britain gave birth to Nigeria, Africa's most populous country. Going by the demographic figures of the National Population Commission of 2006, Nigeria is populated by more than one hundred and fifty million persons and with different and distinct languages, cultural attitudes, sensibilities, varied religious belief systems and practices. Nigeria occupies a total area of 923,768 square kilometers. English is the official language inherited from the British colonization.







## **Introduction continues**

Nigeria is a land of rich and diverse Cultural heritage, with a wide array of sophisticated visual arts and has produced a host of traditional crafts.

The talent, creativity and versatility found in its festivals, music, sculptures, literature and films are well known all over the world, and has a robust film industry known around the world as Nollywood.

## **Main objective**

This paper therefore examines the key ideas of how Museums, Politics, Human Rights and Cultural Diversity interplay to fast-track national development. It also makes recommendations and suggestions on how a strong and developed Nigeria can emerge, drawing inspiration and energy from effective and functional museums as well as respect for human rights and our diversity of cultural expression.

## **WHAT IS CULTURE?**

The term culture is a universal phenomenon, with multifarious meanings, interpretations and applications. In simple terms, it aggregates the totality of a people's way of life. This includes history, religion, morality, economics, politics, social life (marriage, leisure, rites of passage, behavioral traits and patterns), literature, music, folklore and belief systems. The Nigerian Cultural Policy document of 1988 described 'Culture' as:

## **MUSEUMS:**

These are great institutions that collect, research, conserve and interpret materials evidence of man and his environment in the service of society and for its development. Such services include fostering intercultural awareness, affirming and establishing a sense of dignity to both minority and majority cultural communities.

## **POLITICS:**

This is the science of government, which consists in the regulation and method of governance of a nation and state, for the preservation of its safety, peace and prosperity, comprehending the defense of its existence and rights against foreign as well as internal control or conquest; the argumentation of its strengths and resources and the protection and improvement of their morals.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS:**

This refers to the inalienable right of a person on earth; the right that comes to a person as a human being. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) agrees that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” as a base for sustainable human development.

## **DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS:**

Cultural diversity was defined by the UNESCO's 33<sup>rd</sup> General Convention in Paris in October 2005 as "the manifold ways in which the cultures of groups and societies find expression. These expressions are passed on within and among groups and societies." These expressions are used by human beings to identify themselves in their localities. These identities could be manifested in

## **Cultural expressions continue**

food, dress, housing, language, occupation, cultural activities, goods, services, values and living. These diversities are nurtured and promoted by artists and other stakeholders in the creative industry. Some of these cultural expressions include; our different mode of dressing, linguistic differences, festivals, ceremonies, celebrations, shrines, artifacts (both antiquities and contemporary), monuments, architecture, food, etc.

## **NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:**

**“Is a process of enhancing the productive forces of a country for the actualization of more prosperous and meaningful life for its citizens.”**

It also refers to the upward growth of a nation in terms of integration, education, health, democratic and political participation, the accessibility to power unhindered by linguistics and other cultural barriers.

A people's culture is no more or no less than the totality of their creative endeavours. For any developmental process to be meaningful, it must be based on the culture of the people.

## **MUSEUMS & CULTURAL RIGHTS**

“UNESCO is with the view to preserving the fruitful diversity of the cultures so as to recommend such international agreements as may be necessary to promote the free flow of ideas by words, sounds and image. Realizing that cultural diversity is a driving force of development, not only in respect of economic growth, but also as a means of leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life, a few Cultural Conventions, which provide a solid basis for the promotion and protection of cultural diversity, were invented”.

## **Museums and Cultural Rights continues**

### **The six conventions are:**

2005 – International Conference of 14<sup>th</sup> November in Paris

2002 - Round table of Ministers of Culture on Tangible Cultural Heritage – a minor of Cultural Diversity 11 -12 December in Istanbul Turkey.

2000 – Round table of Ministers of Culture “2000 -2010 Cultural Diversity Challenges of the Market Place”  
UNESCO, Paris

2009 – Round table of Ministers of Culture  
“Culture and Creativity in a Global World” 2<sup>nd</sup> November on  
the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference  
of UNESCO, Paris.

1998 – International Conference on Cultural Policies for  
Development, 30<sup>th</sup> march – 2<sup>nd</sup> April – Stockholm, Sweden.

1982 – World Conference on Cultural Policies  
(MONDIALCULT) and Mexico City Declaration – Mexico.

## **MUSEUMS AND POLITICS**

Museums, according to S.J. Redman (June 12:2006) sometimes by mere fact of their existence, can prove to be politically charged and controversial.

He stated that in May 2006, the Museum of Soviet Repression opened in down town Georgia.

EurasiaNet.org reported that “Although Georgians insist that the museum is simply meant to commemorate the estimated 880,000 Georgians killed or exiled under Soviet rule, some Russian politicians see the one room exhibit as a barb aimed straight at the Kremlin”

## **Museums & Politics continues**

In Nigeria today we have the National War Museum in the south eastern part of Nigeria Umuahia which has long become a tourist destination for foreign visitors and those who only read or heard of the war. So also is the bullet ridden car used by the assassinated former Nigerian Head of State which is displayed at the Lagos Museum.

## **Museums & Politics continues**

How can museums impact positively in our politics?

The cultural policy for Nigeria aptly supplies the answers thus:

**“The state shall establish museums as repositories of relics of our past achievements and as sources of inspiration to the present generation”.**

The expectation of our National Anthem that

**“the labour of our heroes past shall never be in vain”**

is yawning for actualization in the development and adoption of the Nigerian version of democracy, if only to be at par with the

## **Museums & Politics**

community of nations that have cultural approach to politics and government. We could use museum for conflict resolutions by drawing attention to historical monuments in which people co-existed with one another, cultural diversity notwithstanding. You can also use relics of wars to re-enforce the dangers/disadvantages of wars.

## **How do we achieve this?**

Through educational and public awareness programmes, promotion and understanding of the importance for the protection of diversity of cultural expressions could be achieved. The Nigerian politics and democracy of our dream would thus engineer a political leadership that sees our cultural diversity in the following perspectives.

- a. The more people there are involved in a process, the more ideas and points of view that can be generated and combined.
- b. The more people actively involved offer the possibility for a system of checks and balances, a screening of ideas,
- c. The introduction of more diverse perspectives creates the opportunity for a creative conflict- a clash of desperate points of view, out of which more innovative alternatives and decisions can emerge.

e. Diversity is a strength containing human resources -each member bringing with him or her range of values, interest, opinions, experiences and skills that may remain dormant, unless tapped by an appropriate style of leadership and government. Dynamic and engaging democracies are the case where the level of participation is high because of the level of literacy and awareness – where equals come to meet without prejudices.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Establishing a government and political leadership is one thing but making it effective and acceptable is quite different. Winning the confidence and respect of the people is predicated on the enjoyment of fundamental human rights. Fortunately, chapter four of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is awash with these rights as follow:-

- a. Right to life
- b. Right to dignity of human person
- c. Right to personal liberty
- d. Right to fair hearing

## **Human Rights & National Development Continues**

- e. Right to private and family life
- f. Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- g. Right to freedom of expression and press
- h. Right to peaceful assembly and association
- i. Right to freedom of movement
- j. Right to freedom from discrimination
- k. Right to acquire and own immovable property  
anywhere in Nigeria.

## **UNESCO's Convention on the Promotion & Protection of cultural expressions (2005)**

One of the guiding principles of this convention is:  
Principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom.

This principle stipulates that Cultural Diversity can be protected and promoted only if human rights and fundamental freedom, such as freedom of expression, information and communication, as well as the ability of individuals to choose cultural expressions, are guaranteed.

## **Human Rights & National Development Continues**

Nigeria is a culturally heterogeneous or multi-cultural country.

Our cultural diversity is no doubt a factor of our linguistic disparity which equals to number of ethnic groups.

Olu Obafemi noted that the wordage of our original National Anthem:

**“though tribes and tongues may differ  
in brotherhood we stand”**

and the often quoted **“unity in diversity”** has its root in Nigeria as what unite us are more than our differences.

## **Interdependence of Cultural Expressions**

Kola nut is grown largely in the western part of Nigeria as an economic and cultural product, it is eaten by the people but deployed mainly for cultural and ritualistic symbolism for ceremonies especially naming and wedding ceremonies.

**Kola nut** is eaten massively in the North as dessert and as staple.

As a visitor to Nigeria, you will find it difficult to believe that it is not grown in the North because of the massive consumption rate.

## **Interdependence of Cultural Expression continues**

There is other cultural interdependence among the people of Nigeria.

**Cattle** are reared mainly by the Fulani North, but it is the king of all ceremonies in the south and other parts of the country because no event will be worth its while without slaughtering of a cow.

**Palm oil** is produced in the East but ironically it is the Yoruba (West) who are regarded as the **oily people**, on account of the obsessive love of oil in their daily menu.

## **The Role of Museum in National Development**

As the repository of knowledge and information, our museums contain artifacts and preserve monuments which are immovable artifacts and evidence of landmarks of history that are symbolic and important to us.

## **The Role Continues**

From all indications, museum is at the heart of cultural promotions because the bulk of our arts and past history are recorded and preserved in the museums, galleries and libraries for posterity.

The transmission of such records can only be done through research and learning from such cultural heritage.

## **The Role continues**

Biobaku 1983:5 observed that:

“In ensuring the effectiveness of the role of museum (culture) in our National development, three major considerations should be borne in mind viz rehabilitation, activation and propagation. In Order to rehabilitate our culture, we have to study it to the highest level scientifically, we need to subject it to most modern research methods and expertise.

## **How do we achieve this?**

Here all our universities should be involved, setting up institutes of African studies, Centre of Nigerian Cultural Studies.

In order to achieve the above, all hands must be on deck. The cultural promotion agencies at the local, state and federal government levels, education institutions, mass media, Arts Councils and other government parastatals should work hand in hand to achieve maximum result”.

## **GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN THE CONSERVATION, PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE DIVERSITY OF OUR CULTURAL EXPRESSION**

The Federal Government as the main cultural Change Driver has done a lot in the direction of setting the structures for a cultural orientation and promotion of the creative and performing arts and culture as gateway to social change, human and national development.

## **The Role of Fed. Government Continues**

The Federal Government has some annual designated programmes mapped out for the promotion of our diverse cultural differences for a more understood and unified Nigeria. Some of these programmes include: National Festival of Arts and Culture NAFEST, Abuja Carnival, Various lectures by departments and agencies, Nigeria Fashion Show and Industry which I am going to talk about thereafter and a host of other museum programmes aimed at better understanding of our rich cultural heritage and diversity of our expression as tools for our National Development.

## **THE PROBLEMS**

There is large scale cultural ignorance among Nigerians regarding the quality, worth, and significance of their material culture. There are so much misinformation about our cultural heritage as a result of the legacy of colonialism through their agency of religion and formal western education. Our artifacts, festivals and cultural practices have been undermined and perceived as products of fetishism, paganism, worthlessness and backwardness.

## **Problems Continues**

In Nigeria, since our independence in 1960 according to Dr Sule Bello (1999-53), the most pressing, persistent and recurring problems facing our government has been that of development.

Despite various policies, programmes pursued with a view to developing our infrastructures, economy, education etc, most of these efforts have largely failed to yield appropriate result.

## **Problem identified**

This is because the basic fact that culture, which should define, qualify and invigorate the process, quality and relevance of education, has largely been misunderstood, neglected and misapplied.

This neglect of the role of culture in education and development has been a major set back.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Our Museums should create political departments in their collections so as to fast-track the development of a positive political culture that is transformational and adaptive.

People should develop active interest in visiting and benefiting from the offerings of the museums.

Traditional institutions including palaces should be encouraged to preserve popular customs, laws and values that would benefit political leadership and government.

The Federal Government should provide the necessary environment and funding for the actualization of its policy provisions for Museums.

The National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly through their relevant committees on Arts and Culture should engineer a Nigeria Political Democracy that would minimize the effects of political imperialism.

The provisions of human rights as contained in the Nigerian constitution should be protected to the benefit of all Nigerians.

## **Recommendations Continues**

Massive cultural education should be embarked upon by relevant agencies (e.g. National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) ) to take pride in the strength and plurality of Nigeria.

All Nigerians should see themselves as vanguard in the evolution of pan Nigeria democracy by imbibing Nigerian norms and values as well as developing partnerships across cultural divides.

The diversity of media should also be encouraged to reaffirm the freedom of thought, expression and information dissemination to safeguard human rights and enable diverse cultural expressions to flourish within the society.

## **Recommendation Continues**

Creation of Aesthetic Values. A sense of aesthetic value among the citizenry can help dissuade citizens inclination to violence and destruction of national monuments and civilization.

Correction of colonial mentality. Display of artifacts reflects concrete evidence of our cultural richness and sophistication thus correcting the wrong impressions given by the colonialists that brought civilization to our people.

Promotion of mutual understanding and respect among the various peoples that make up Nigeria – thus assisting to solve the problem of instability which often arises from lack of fuller understanding and genuine respect for one another.

Children and youths should take active part in National Festival of Arts and Culture and such as Abuja Carnival so as to catch them young and encourage them to grow with love and unity while socializing with the other ethnic groups.

By organizing such programmes as “Friends of the Museums”, people from diverse backgrounds can come together and share fellowship, unity and peaceful co-existence.

Local artists that operate in Museum premises showcasing their wares can promote entrepreneurship and solve the unemployment problem in the country.















## **CONCLUSION**

Our ability to successfully benefit from the past should be our success in political socialization and development. This underscores the close relationship between Museum and Politics. The overlapping and interacting of Museums, Politics, Human Rights and Cultural Diversity in Human endeavors will continue to expand. It therefore follows that both can serve best by serving together. In line with all known human rights declarations, the cooperative spirit should permeate human thought and relationship where each is recognized and respected for what he is, to promote authentically, brand distinctiveness, effectiveness and efficiency.

Ladies and Gentlemen

God made no mistake  
by putting all of us together,  
I am very proud to be a Nigerian.

**Nigeria!**  
**Good people !!**  
**Great Nation!!!**



Thank you for your attention

