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USING CULTURE TO ACHIEVE RURAL DEVELOPMENT WITH PARTICULAR
REFERENCE TO THE IGBO ETHNIC GROUP OF NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The Igbo people of eastern part of Nigeria from on set are well organized in their administration of their culture. They take up significant choices that lead to the development or growth of their land. These are cultures practiced by the people for the growth or development of their areas. During the festive period, they come together and impose on themselves for the development of their various communities. With the advent of whiteman and their introduction of Christianity and western culture, some of the pagan methods of celebrating these cultures got modernized. The new yam festival is one of the significant festival of the Igbo people that makes them to come together both at home and in diaspora for the development of their towns and villages. Customarily, during this festival, the daughter both at home and abroad (Umuada or Umungboto), the age grade, the youths, women association (August meeting), council of elders and the unions are all involved in the development project or the other. In the discussion of this paper we will discuss the impact of these cultural activities in the rural development for the advancement of the rural communities in the third world countries like Nigeria.

Introduction

The African culture had been risked by bringing into practice the western culture especially in Nigeria and in Igbo land in

particular. Most of these cultures cannot be traced again, while some had been modernized in such a way that their origins

are unavailable. Sometimes, to differentiate those from the western culture are difficult though the modernized ones are not for bad but for good. One of the modernized is the new yam festival. This is a ceremony that is performed yearly between the months of August and October. Ging by Wikipedia of B. B. C, 2005 the festival is practiced in West Africa and other countries in Africa and beyond.

Before the advent of Christianity, it is celebrated by the titled elders in the communities and the holders of the staff of authority (Ofo holders) and the first male sons in the family (the Diokpa). Like we have earlier said that the celebration of the new yam festival was a pagan ceremony then because rituals were performed during the celebration like cutting into pieces the fatted yam of the family harvest with palm fronds and hanging it in front of their shrine in the vicinity for people to witness the ceremony of the new yam festival. The aim was to appease the gods of their land for fertility, thanksgiving, protection, peace, etc. Anumudu's (1989)

These days, the ceremony had been modified. By the establishment of the new yam festival, the people had realized that it should be used as a strategy for developmental projects. In view of this, everybody, both men and women, young and old, Christians and non-Christians are involved.

During, the period of the new yam festival, there is a mass return of the people from far and near. It should be noted that not all Igbo communities celebrate the new yam festival but majority of them do it through with different names or captions given to it like some call it Iri ji ohuru, ike ji, iwa ji, Ahiajoku, Aju festival, Oru, etc. (Wikipedia B B C 2005).

The Igbo people are always concerned and mindful of their origin and they believe in the saying that "Charity begins at home" (*A na-esi n'ulo mara mma puwa n'ama*) That is always their watch word. Their aim is always to develop their father land/community because whether east or west, home is the best. They believe that death awaits every man and in his graveyard is his father's land. That is the reason the Igbo man is brought home whenever and wherever he dies (*Isi nwoke adighi nma iko na mba*).

This is one of the major reasons when an Igbo man dies in America, London, Germany, China, Spain and even Ghana, efforts should be made to carry his corpse down to his father's land no matter what it will cost them. The death and burial of an Igbo man draws a lot of people from far and near (relatives, friends and even enemies). This is one of the significant justifications the Igbo man consider it necessary to develop his community. No matter the Igbo man is seen managing and living in uncomfortable houses outside his home town and where he is earning his livelihood, he prefers to build a mansion in his village rather than building it outside his village. That means the Igbo people gather wealth outside his home and uses it to develop his home (*Aku ruo ulo, ya ezuo oke*). He always likes to make his home comfortable so that whenever he is at home, he enjoys comfort ability of his labor outside of his home town.

There are other reasons for the development of the people's rural areas, these include unity, peace and welfare of the entire community because whenever all these are complete there is always fast progress and development in that area. In the achievement of these development and projects in the rural areas, the daughters of

the land (Umuada/Umungboto), the sge grades (Out Ogbo/ Ebiri), the town union (Otu Umunna), the youths (Nditorobia) the married women, etc are all involved. With these ideas, a strong town union is formed with branches all over the country to enable everybody to be present and also to be involved in the yearly activities of the new yam festival. In this regard, letters are sent to the different groups and town union branches to prepare and take part in the ceremony in their communities.

Culture

According to oxford dictionary is the customs and beliefs of a particular country or group. Culture simply means peoples way of life, which include their laid down rules that can lead to progress.

People without culture are bound to live in disorderliness. When writing about the igbo culture, B B C of wikipedia had it that the igbo cultures are the customs, practice and traditions of the igbo people of southern-eastern Nigerian. It comprises uncivilized practices as well as concepts added into the igbo culture either by evolution or by external influence. The culture we aim at this paper is the accepted culture meant for the development of the communities in igbo land. No right thinking person will like to be known as enemy of progress, because culture brings progress.

Aja AA (2008) sums it up by concluding that, the total ways of a societys life pattern, which is woven around organization behavior, governance, administrative and strategic power. Culture brings about unity, oneness, cooperation and relationship with their fellows of the same culture

Development

For us to talk about development, we must first of all look and analyze the level of

poverty; inequality and unemployment in the area. For a place to be called rural area the level of these three concepts must be high. A rural area can become a developed area if people decide to develop it. Individuals, groups, organizations, unions, etc. develop an area. Development always brings progress. Rogers T. Dictionary (2009) opined that development means progress. People setup developmental projects to minimize poverty, create employment and to make the rural area conducive for habitation. It brings about quality growth, reviewing economic growth and at the same time meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water and sanitation.

The Contribution of the Different Groups in the Development Of The Rural Areas in Igbo Land.

The daughter (Umuada/Mgboto)

The daughters of the land are all the female children born in families in igbo land and every community have their own daughters association, although there are some places where this association does not exist. Where they exist, they are always strong and highly respected by their people because they are always in fore front in making peace, unity and progress in their fathers land. They help in the settlement of disputes in different areas in their various villages and towns. For instance, settlement of dispute between husbands and wives, brothers and their unmarried sisters, widows and widowers, in such cases like land, properties, quarrel, kingship position etc. this is because where there is peace, progress and development of the place is fast.

That is why Ogbalu (ND) stated that "Umuada play an important role through their leaders in recommendation of abolition or modification of customs, taboos, nature

and performance of festivals, rituals and observance pertaining to the woman in authority. He also wrote that “to some an extent, Umuada acting through their leaders help to settle disputes either in their fathers town or in another in which they are married.

Building Of Town Halls:

In fact- the daughters of the town embark on such developmental projects like building of town halls for gatherings like wedding, conferences seminar and workshop, the women august meeting etc. The halls are also sources of revenue for the development of the towns when rented by people for one reason or the other.

Building Of Private Schools:

They also build private schools like nursery, kindergarten and primary, etc. to ease the parents the inconveniences of taking their children to far places. They do this in order to see that the cultures of the people are taught to them from the grassroots and to wipe out illiteracy amongst the people. This is because knowledge is wealth. They help in the renovation and expansion of the existing school building so as to accommodate a larger number of the children in their community. They sponsor brilliant children through scholarships especially those whose parents could not afford to send them to school to train them.

Building Of Health Centres

The daughters also help in building health centers. They bring health services to the door post of the people. This has helped immensely to stop or wipe off some of the excuses people give for not going to the hospital for treatment especially in the immunization of pregnant mothers and children. This has also reduced the rate of death and infant mortality in the area. They

also sponsor free medical service for their people by engaging one or two doctors who visit the health centers from time to time to see the people.

Age Grade (Otu Ogbo/Ebiri)

When discussing about the age grades, ogbalu said: to “all males in the wn who have attained manhood (iwanya akwa) are organized into age grades called various names: otu ogbo, ebiri and uke”. He also state that “during the establishment and initiation of a new age grade, the members may give suggestions as to the name which they are to be known and addressed and if approved by the elders, it becomes their name.”

They are groups of people within the same age bracket which may be from one to three years interval. In most communities, the age grades are formed between three to five years. They are given names according to their grades to differentiate them from the other age grades and this helps to know the age grade that is embarking in any developmental project or the other. Sometimes the different age grades join together to embark in one project or the other as need may be. Such projects are:

Building and renovation of market:

They know that trading is essential for human living and so they tax and levy themselves for the building of new market stalls and renovation of the existing ones for easy selling and buying of the rural products. They put modern facilities that attract traders from far and near like electrifying the market, provision of constant water supply, and conveniences, reconstruction of roads that leads to the market and provision of security. By so doing, development takes place in the rural areas.

Building and renovation of schools

They build schools and renovate schools that are affected by a disaster either through rain, thunder, fire, erosion and war. They also help in replacement of some of the infrastructures that has spoilt beyond repair and repair the repairable ones. They support the schools by donating some learning aids to the school. They also make outdoor activities very interesting by providing football and playground where the existing school has no playground. Sometimes they employ the teachers and pay them attractive salary inured to retain them. This help to attract parents to bring their children from nearby towns. They fence the school in order to provide security in the school for the safety of the children. With all these provision mentioned above, development takes place.

Building of civic centers

The age grade help in the development of their communities as well by building civic centers. Where the town unions, the married women, etc always have their meetings. It is also at the centers that almost all the entertainment that follow the new yam ceremony is done. for instance , cultural dances, drama, filmshows, cinema. Exhibition of farm products, weeding ceremonies, launching etc. are done in the civic centre/halls.

Construction and reconstruction of roads

They see that the roads are maintained because good roads enhance development as people from far and near will have access to the markets, schools, health centers ,etc.

Training of people for better tomorrow

The age grade assist in the training of their late members children. They also build houses for any lost member who had no living house of his own. They give

scholarship to privileged and gifted children in the community.

The Youth (Ndi Ntorobia)

They are mostly people who are still under the control of their parents and seniors. They may be between the age of 18-40 years. They help in the development of their communities by embarking on road work. Sometimes they take up an exercise that will yield them such as barbing, or working for people for payment.

They construct such things like entrance gate to their communities, security post stands etc. They form vigilante groups and organize night watches against robbers or men of the underworld. They see to the cleanliness of their cemeteries, streams, health centers and the halls in their communities. They help to guard against the destruction of the already existing projects. They also serve as direct laborers to any development project embarked by the daughters, the age grades, the women, the town union, etc thereby lessening the cost of labor on such projects.

The Married Women (Umundom)

These are groups of women from different places married in the community. In some places, women from the same communities inter-marry with their male folk while others are those married from a different community. All of them are known as married women (Alutaradi) in igbo land. They assist their husbands in the development of their different communities through:

Monetary contributions and advices to their husbands from the different meetings for the development of their community in the following areas:

- a. Scholarship to less privileged children and bright children in their communities.
- b. Building of acquisition centres for the training of girls in one trade or the other. They also train some in some skilled work so that every person is engaged in one job or other for the benefit of the people and the community as well as warding off theft and their criminal acts that occurs as a result of being idle. For instance, the fashion and design centers, trains people in sewing of dresses, computer training centers, hair salons, catering services.
- c. Establishment of oil mill: this is for the processing of palm products especially in the rural areas where palm trees grow in abundance for the production of local oil (Red oil). The establishment of a standard oil mill attracts people from other communities to come for the procession of the palm fruits for extraction of the local oil. This is also a source of revenue to the communities for their development.
- d. Establishment of Garri industries: The married also provide garri processing machines which help in the production of garri as one of the staple food in the rural areas. The availability of garri in these areas help to attract people to the local market in the communities which also aid development. With the establishment of garri industry, it eases life and reduces the producing garri manually.
- e. Provision of buses: They help in providing buses that convey people from the rural communities to the main roads leading to the big cities and to their different destinations with little or less money on transport.
- f. Provision of rentals: The women help to generate fund for the development of their communities by providing some items that are rented out for different occasions, such items are canopies, chairs, plates, pots, coolers, wedding gowns & decorating materials for wedding, burials and important gatherings.

The Town Union

The town union (Umunna/Oha obodo/Obilobi) always comprises of full fledged men that are of age to take responsibility. That is why they can gather to decide how to develop their town. If one cannot provide the required money, one can always make good contributions through advices or even do some manual labor to help in the development of the town. He can also join in organizing things that will help move the town forward. The town unions always have a place for their deliberations in the Eze's palace (Obi) or the town halls.

According to agugu (2006). "Umunna na-enwe ebe ha na ano ogbako maobu igba izu. The town union comprises of responsible men in the town and not only the elders. In the town union assembly everybody is allowed to make contributions and the opinion of the majority is taken (ohakarasi). For instance, they carry out projects like rural electrification, supply of pipe borne water to all the villages and kindreds for all and sundry; provide good roads and other social amenities like schools and hospitals.

The establishment of the Umunna assembly from the beginning is for peace and progress. Almost all the development task is carried out by Umunna assembly. The achievement/roles of the town union (umunna/oha obodo/obilobi) cannot be over

emphasized. Every town that has all the essential amenities in the rural areas has them with the help of umunna/oha obodo/obilobi. Some individuals abroad also help in the development of their towns and villages. No reasonable person will like to be addressed archaic because his village is so backward in development. No matter how one may be rich abroad and he has not made it known in his village by helping in developing of the areas, he will not be recognized.

Conclusion/Suggestion.

Development is so essential in the rural setting. Everybody cannot live in the township. And those living outside their town must be reaching home when the need arises. Development of the rural should be a concern for all. We also call on the different communities in the 3rd world to hold tight to those cultures that would help in the development of the rural areas, and not those cultures that will hinder development. We also encourage Ndigbo of Nigeria not to abandon their festivals like the new yam ceremony.

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