

Module: Unravelling Heritage: History, Theory, Methods (HPHE7002)**Discussion Paper****Maximising Cultural Heritage Resources for Socio-economic Development in Akoko Edo Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria.****Introduction and Statement of the Problem**

Cultural heritage encompasses the totality of a people's way of life. Essentially, it is the way of life acquired within society or groups of people and transmitted through generations. This view of cultural heritage as a people's way of life and transmitted across generations, resonates with that held within Nigeria's cultural Policy which defines heritage as: the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1994).

Cultural heritage may therefore be seen as the various ways in which groups of people/communities express their identity, or what Jan Assman terms the awareness of selfhood (Assman, 1995)

In this paper, this researcher argues for, and proposes, that the maximisation of cultural heritage resources and assets in Akoko Edo Local Government Area of Edo State, mid-western Nigeria may help calibrate the much-needed socio-economic development in the area and serve as inspiration for other parts of the country.

In terms of landmass and population, Akoko Edo is one of the largest local government areas in the federation, and regrettably, one of the poorest and least developed. Interestingly too, one of the richest in terms of cultural heritage and natural resources, albeit largely unnoticed and unexploited. Initial investigations into the possible causes of this state of neglect and underdevelopment in Akoko Edo by this researcher (based largely on discussions and interview sessions with various stakeholders in the area), revealed that the local government council does not have any organised initiative in place for the generation of internal revenue, and is solely dependent on monthly allocations from the federal government. This researcher also learned that the monthly allocation from the federal government is only enough to service recurrent expenditure, with nothing available for any meaningful socio-economic development projects.

It is in the light of these considerations that this work hopes to document all the available cultural heritage resources in Akoko Edo and investigate opportunities for their maximisation for the sustainable development of the area.

Objectives of the Study and Significance

The study is aimed at highlighting the need for the maximisation of cultural heritage resources for sustainable socio-economic development. The study underscores the immense socio-economic development potential in harnessing the rich cultural heritage resources in Akoko Edo in mid-western Nigeria.

As a guide, the specific objectives sought includes:

- (1) Locate, identify and document the rich cultural resources in Akoko Edo Local Government Area such as festivals, sites and monuments, historical buildings, historical battlefields, traditional medicine, ecological features, material culture, and to produce a cultural map of Akoko Edo.
- (2) To inspire confidence in community engagement and empowering women and girls, protecting cultural heritage and safeguarding traditional knowledge in Akoko Edo local government area.
- (3) Contribute to knowledge about the pivotal role cultural heritage can play in rural and national development.

Significance of the Study

I believe that this study is significant and timely as it engages the interface between heritage and sustainable development planning in Nigeria, on the one hand, while investigating the central role of culture in African development planning, on the other.

This study is also significant because it examines how the sustainable development of an alternative path to developing our rural areas could be encouraged and organized, especially now that the This is particularly relevant as the Nigerian federal government seeks to diversify the nation's economy and move away from historical dependence on petroleum resources as its chief foreign exchange earner and economic pivot.

Research Methodology

The research methodology will be based on the use of ethnographic interviews, focus group discussions, non-participant observation, and the collection of relevant data from available records. The various methodologies to be deployed for data collection are explained briefly:

Pilot Study

A pilot study will be conducted to generate background knowledge of Akoko Edo Local Government - the study area. This will be particularly useful to help determine questions which need to be raised in the data collection phase were appropriate ones. The pilot study will also enable this researcher to identify groups and key participants, as well as arrange subsequent interviews.

Ethnographic Interviews

Considering the nature of this study, ethnographic interviews with the members of each of the communities and towns in Akoko Edo, will be particularly helpful in gathering information about the peoples and their cultures, and the identification of historical sites.

Focus Group Discussions

This will be employed in documenting the festivals, dance, material culture.

Non-participants Observation

This approach was helpful in identifying and documenting some of the festivals witnessed, the production stages at some of the local craft centres, and activities at the shrines and grooves.

Literature Review and Conceptual Clarification

According to UNESCO, *The World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy* clearly enunciates the role of World Heritage properties as a guarantor of sustainable development, with a direct call to harness their full potential to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2019).

The above statement by UNESCO undergirds the central argument in this paper – the maximisation of cultural heritage resources for sustainable development.

Professor Ezinwa's call for the organisation and effective management of cultural heritage resources in line with the drive by the federal government for the diversification of the Nigerian economy is apt here. For Ezinwa, the proper organisation and management of the tourism potential of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage assets will not only serve as a veritable source of foreign exchange earnings but will also help boost its international image while also forging new partnerships and relations across the world (Ezinwa, 2019).

The call by Kabir Garba for the government of Nigeria to effectively tap into the socio-economic potential of the nation's cultural heritage resources to stimulate grassroots development, create jobs while also taking advantage of the concomitant gains of such an initiative – as he puts it that cultural heritage resources can serve as a panacea for peace, unity and diplomacy (Garba, 2017).

Most of the literature on development speaks in very broad terms, as they embrace largely philosophical foundations to African development-based on culture and self-reliance. This literature will be outlined and analyzed in subsequent sections.

Cultural Heritage Resources: The concept of cultural resource is still relatively new in Nigeria today.

For the purpose of conceptual clarification, a good understanding of the concept of cultural heritage resources will be enhanced by the exploration of what culture means, broadly, and contextually vis-avis Nigeria.

Culture, according to the anthropologist Kottak, 'is unique to humanity' (Kottak, 2000). A popular definition of culture is the one offered more than a century ago in his book *Primitive Culture* by the British anthropologist Edward Tylor in which he states that; "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, acts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and beliefs acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1958). The main point in Tylor's definition of Culture is "acquired by man as a member of Society". Tylor's definition focuses on attributes that people acquire not through biological inheritance but by growing up in a particular society where they are exposed to a specific cultural tradition.

Another anthropologist Leslie White defined Culture as dependent upon symbols and posits that culture consists of tools, implements, utensils, clothing, ornaments, customs, institutions, beliefs, rituals, games, works of art, language, etc. (White 1959:3).

For White, culture originated when our ancestors acquired the ability to use symbols, that is, to organize and bestow meaning on a thing or event, and correspondingly, to grasp and appreciate such meanings. The Nigerian Cultural Policy document (1994) shares the same meaning of Culture with Tylor (cited earlier) and White (as above) that culture constitutes the totality of a people's way of life evolved over time to meet the challenges of their environment.

From the above definitions of culture, we can deduce that culture is an all-embracing and pervasive phenomenon. It is the totality of a people's life. It is culture that reveals the peculiarity and uniqueness of any people. Culture, without equivocation, is what grows out of a people's attempt to master and meet the challenges of living in their environment. Culture is therefore the life buoy of any genuine and meaningful development program. Here, we may agree with Okot P' Bitek that 'culture is philosophy as lived and celebrated in society' (Okot P' Bitek, 1986).

For Okot P' Bitek culture is a human generated activity, and that culture is what differentiates humanity from animals. Okot P' Bitek seems keen to remind the reader that human beings are not like dry leaves, smoke or clouds which are blown here and there by the wind, but a true

force for shaping his environment through a system of culture. Human beings subsist within organizations and institutions: the family and clan, a chiefdom or kingdom or age – set system or society. They have a religion, an army, a legal and other institutions, and all these are formed by, and in fact built around the central ideas people have developed – ideas about what life is and means to them: that is their social philosophy, their world view and their culture. Cultural heritage resources, in the light of the definitions of culture discussed thus far, are those resources that are peculiar to a people or, those resources of a culture that has evolved with the progress of that culture or group of people.

We may therefore speak of cultural heritage resources in terms of festivals, performing arts: music, dance, songs, folklore, archeological, and historical sites and monuments, traditional crafts such as weaving, basketry, blacksmithing, dress, ceremonies and a whole range of tangible and intangible heritage which the people have chosen to place a value on or hold as valuable.

The cultural resources of any people or society speaks volubly about their world view, aspirations, and the capabilities of that particular community or group of people.

Through such cultural heritage resources, as valued by the people, we are offered a window into the inner recesses of the people's mind and develop an understanding of their thinking.

Cultural heritage can help portray a people's identity As Jan Assman puts it 'a celebration of selfhood' Assman, 1995).

Cultural heritage resources provide the markers for the uniqueness of groups of people and communities, making them stand out, making them a branch of humankind – sources of understanding of our abilities, differences and similarities on the world stage.

Commenting on the importance of cultural heritage resources, Agbaje-Williams and Ogundiran argue, that cultural resources are more than material remains, that is, they are not mainly archaeological, rather, they embrace all humanistic disciplines interested in the study of the heritage of man (Agbaje-Williams and Ogundiran, 1992). Both writers further aver that it is fundamentally important for the future development of African societies that its vast cultural heritage resources be properly documented and efficiently managed. With both writers, cultural heritage resources must be properly documented and managed in order to contribute to the socio-economic development of the society.

For Agbaje-Williams and Ogundiran, the proper documentation and management of cultural heritage resources is a humanistic practice which endeavours to promote cultural awareness through research, conservation and education for the purpose of enhancing cultural development in a group, invariably seeking to exploit these cultural resources for socioeconomic advancement (Agbaje-Williams and Ogundiran, 2000).

Cultural heritage resources provide information about people and help establish important connection to the present and the future. Cultural resources embody a rich heritage of human experience and cultural identities. They tell a compelling story of our earlier nations, states, and communities, and help us to understand how we got where we are today, and where we are going or where we could go. Cultural resources also provide evidence about important historical trends and events, reflect people's everyday lives and significant accomplishments and when carefully identified, evaluated, registered and preserved, all help to convey our history as a people with a past –thereby pointing the way forward. Through our cultural resources, we can see and learn more about what people from the past created, used and valued and the meaning they have for all of us today.

Socio-Economic Development

According to the World Bank, developing nations need to fashion their own brands and economic development will ultimately derive from homegrown strategies (World Bank, 2000).

The literature on African development strongly emphasizes a commitment to what may be termed a philosophy of development. This philosophy, guided by the self-reliance theory of development, as opposed to the dependencia or 'trickle-down theory' of development (Verhelst, 1990) strongly supports African Culture (P' Bitek, 1986) as the foundation upon which its development plans must be anchored.

The socio-economic development of society is invariably a development of its people, or the people that make up that society. Development is about people, that is, people are the means and the fund of development. Socio-economic development is therefore an 'investment in people' (Ogundiran, 2013) as a strategy for further progress and development.

One of Africa's foremost economists, Akinwunmi Ogundiran firmly asserts the pricelessness of self-reliance and indigenous knowledge. For Ogundiran, culture, local skills and local practices must be recognised in any well-meaning socio-economic development programme in Nigeria (Ogundiran, 2013). For Ogundiran, socio-economic development is a collective responsibility in which all have to share in the labour as well as in the gains of development.

Concluding Summary

This work hopes to explore, document and propose – through its findings cultural heritage resource development initiatives as put forward in this study will no doubt ultimately help to brighten our future economic horizon and increase our role in the global economy.

This work hopes to ignite debates and inspire research on a nationwide scale, to identify, document, evaluate, and register all cultural heritage resources as a prelude to maximising them for the overall benefit of society – if society benefits, it is the people who benefit, and vice versa. Documenting and registering our knowledge of ourselves - our people and our positive capacity as a nation, is fundamentally important in fostering national peace, community engagement and cooperation amongst our diverse peoples.

Cultural heritage, this study hopes, can play an integral part in development efforts in Nigeria and hopes to demonstrate the need to organise, document, manage and protect cultural heritage assets, and maximise them for the collective socio-economic development of the nation starting with our rural communities.

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