

# Integrating Culture in Africa's Economic Development

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*“Max Weber was right. If we learn anything from history of economic development, it is that culture makes all the difference.” – David Landes*

**Abstract-** *The importance of culture as panacea of development can fully be appreciated by considering its role in regenerating world economies. In the last few decades, interest by nations in culture as an economic force of its own has been manifested in their development blueprints. In this paper we argue that although there is evidence from early civilizations and economic manifestos of African countries that culture drives economic growth, there is a dearth of explicit literature on how this happens. This is a library-based qualitative study in which we argue that culture fosters economic growth. The study draws on post-structuralism, modernism and post-colonial approaches to find that institutions and practices reveal particular cultural pretensions, ethics and meanings; and gives recommendations on integrating culture with economic growth on the continent.*

**Key words-** *Culture; Integration; Economic Growth; Africa*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The implicit reference to culture and the dearth cultural literature available in development studies presupposes that development thrives in the absence of culture. Yet, Malinowski (1962) defines culture as the integral whole of society citing artifacts, organization and values as the embodiments of culture. The reference to artifacts as the means and mode of production coincides with Karl Marx's definition of development in terms of 'economic base'. This paper argues that there is a possibility that African culture can be integrated with economic development policies in a more explicit way to help accelerate economic development. The argument draws on the theories of post-structuralism, modernity and the postcolonial studies to examine how institutions and practices exhibit particular cultural persuasions, ethics and meaning. The study undertakes library-based methodology in which studies surveyed use survey data as well as experimental evidence to establish the impact of culture on economic development.

## 2. ISSUES OF DEFINITION, CULTURE AND RENAISSANCE

Interrogating the place of culture in economic development in African must begin with pertinent questions on what African culture really is. Talking about African culture starts with Ancient Egypt which is arguably the oldest recorded civilization on the continent. By the close of the 20th century researchers were still grappling with the issue of whether there had been significant contact between Egyptian civilization and the rest of Africa because this

knowledge would inform dynamics responsible for framing Africa's diverse cultures and civilizations as we know them today. There are earlier theoretical postulations about how Ancient Egypt in Africa was a construct distortion of racial prejudice and imperial interests; and now as an intellectually illegitimate discourse. O'Connor & Reid (2007) make an inquiry into the role of culture in economic development in Africa; and whether Ancient Egypt was the source of Africa's sophisticated culture in the same way Greece was to Europe; or whether the Ancient Egyptian civilization was markedly representative of distinctive and important African concepts not found elsewhere. This question is relevant since studies show North Africa—in general and Egypt, in particular—studied with rarely contextual mention of sub-Saharan Africa and vice-versa a situation that makes it difficult to engage Africa's culture from a common standpoint. Even within the Sub-Saharan Africa, similar problems of cultural unity are notable when emphasis is placed on specific regions without making reference to similarities in other regions in terms of thought and symbol that might lead to conclusions of a united African culture.

But even if some studies maintain that sub-Saharan Africa has drawn from the Egyptian civilization, there still remains a challenge: The Egypt that is made reference to in the Bible and the Koran is one that is oppressive, despotic, vindictive and hostile and which must therefore be avoided. These religions have come to stigmatize Egypt as an epitome of repression, commonly referred to as Egypt of the pharaohs in both the Bible and the Koran. This poses a long running internal challenge to the acceptance and owning of Egypt as cradle of Africa's civilization by Africa's majority Christians and Muslims.

In view makes the concept of African culture as derived from Egyptian civilization quite elusive.

So, what really is Africa(n)? Apparently, the geographical demarcation of the world into what we today know as continents is evidently Europe's fixation with branding for its own superiority complex motives. Mazrui (1986) regards the continent's borders to include Arabian Peninsula whereas other people identify Africa in terms of 'black' or sub-Saharan. It is clear that the definition of what Africa(n) is, remains complex. Mudimbe (1988) blames Europe for the confusion which is meant to depict Africa as the dark opposite of Europe.

Perhaps, the most critical moment of reviving African civilization could be attributed to the words of Thabo Mbeki:

*...the colonizers sought to enslave the African mind and to destroy the African soul. They sought to oblige us to accept that as African we had contributed nothing to human civilization except as beasts of burden....The beginning of the rebirth of our continent must be Our own rediscovery of our soul, captured and made permanently available in the great works of creativity represented by the pyramids of Egypt, the stone buildings of Axum and the ruins of Carthage and Great Zimbabwe. (Mbeki 1998:299)*

Integration of African culture in economic development brings to the 1980s intellectual and political conversations on African unity. South Africa's cultural rebirth debate arising from Mbeki's averment has ignited further discourse on Africa's disjointed unity. The call for Africa's rebirth by Thabo Mbeki rattles similar calls by Pan-African leaders such as Nyerere, Nkurumah and Senghor who argued that African cultural unity and identity was panacea for both political and economic development. The trio called for a return to African heritage in pursuit of economic modernity devoid of inhumane materialism of the West. The three leaders held that the solutions to the Africa's present and the future socio-economic challenges were to be traced to Africa's nostalgic past. Yet these attempts appear problematic as they do not take into consideration hundreds of distinct peoples and languages within the African continent with diverse cultural orientations. Murdock (1959), however, recognizes that history has proof of some African cultural unity at regional level which could be encouraged to help frame its future. Kuper (1982) emphasizes the unity of southern Africa forms of kinship, marriage and exchange whereas Vansina (1990) identifies long traditions and continuity in Equatorial Africa over a long period of time as references Africa can begin from to forge continental unity.

Even with these seemingly encouraging findings from these scholars, the challenge remains whether it is tenable for scholars to engage a more inclusive notion of African unity to bring all the diverse membership of countries on board. To some scholars, such unity exists is a possibility

through expansion of the Bantu group that sprawls the continent due to the linguistic commonality. But this approach has its challenges too, for, it leave out many "significant" people from inclusion from North Africa which includes Egypt which is supposedly a uniting factor due to its history of earliest civilization on the continent? This may mean therefore that focus should be put more, first, on ethnic cultural out before national, regional or continental. Economic development through a cultural approach should not be tied to political boundaries if Africa has to realize the impact of its culture on the economy. Each community's culture should define itself under this approach but it should be done with reference to a particular country's or regional economic agenda.

### **3. MAPPING ARTS AND CULTURE AS ECONOMIC ASSETS**

It is noteworthy that most African arts and culture continue to dissipate due to changing lifestyles that continue to disrupt and disperse the traditional community set-ups. In view of this, some aspects of these arts and culture are changing their traditional forms and losing their original thrust and meaning. Wanjala (2008) argues that there is need to map expressive arts and culture with a view to sustain valuable expressive, artistic and literary heritage; capture the repertoire of indigenous endangered tangible and intangible cultural heritage; identify, analyze and document them and; establish a resource centre for packaging, reference and archival. Whereas Wanjala (2008) focuses on expressive arts and culture this paper examines the possibilities of both expressive and material culture to bring about economic development. So, what are these arts and cultures? They are film, music, oral literature, fine arts, crafts, medicine, foods and tourism. The artists and experts in these areas should be identified and clustered.

Whether Africa can revive its culture as an essential economic development aspect depends on three important issues: first, whether Egyptian civilization with its core value(s) can support Africa's dynamic economic base with constant innovation of artifacts. Second, will the organizations created under the Egyptian-based civilization evolve and respond to the ever-changing economic base? And, third, will the essential meaning of Egyptian civilization be maintained to support internal but consistent cultural entity of artifacts, organization and values? The core aspects of this civilization should propel the African continent towards technological innovation which is significant in productivity growth and in the evolution of economic base. Maddison (2006) reveals that during the two thousand years before the eighteenth century, the annual income growth per capita in the Western economy was a paltry 0.05 percent, and that it took one thousand and four hundred years to double this per capita income. This researcher further shows that during the first one hundred years after the eighteenth century, the average income growth rate per capita hopped to one percent and

this doubled after about only seventy years. This significant increase is attributed to improvement in technological inventions after the industrial revolution in the second half of the eighteenth century. Before Industrial Revolution, technological inventions were basically by experience or accident whereas such inventions were dictated by experiment and science after Industrial Revolution. Africa needs technological innovations that resonate with its culture to achieve rapid economic growth. The need for indigenous innovations within Africa's cultural milieu is important in technological innovation. But African culture should be free to borrow best practices from other cultures such as European and Chinese, for, new technological inventions could be costly, risky and uncertain in terms of results whereas borrowed technology is tested and therefore certain, low cost and less risky. But do cultural factors really matter in a country's economic development? Are these factors measurable to compare with conventional economic factors such as savings and investments? Granato, Inglehart & Leblang (1996) hold that cultural and economic factors are complementary to economic growth. These researchers empirically apply econometric techniques to evaluate the relative merits of both cultural and economic factors in economic development. Of course cultural factors on their own cannot explain all the cross-national differences in economic growth rates, for every economy experiences noteworthy variations in growth rates annually as a consequence of short-term effects such as technological shocks or due to factors beyond control and which eventually affect output. Yet, cultural factors are an important narrative in economic growth. The example of how Confucianism—despite the contribution of both political and economic institutions—has influenced economic growth of East Asian economies that have outperformed the rest of the world by significant margins is worth citing. In converse, during the same period, African economies registered low growth rates implying that society's economic and political institutions without the cultural ones, cannot determine economic growth. McClelland (1961) examines how achievement motivation results from the values that were emphasized in children by their parents, guardians, schools and other socializing agencies. The researcher hypothesizes that some societies, more than others, encourage economic achievement. Since it was not feasible for him to give direct statistics on the values emphasized through national surveys, the researcher attempts to measure them indirectly. He uses content analysis of the story books used to educate the children. His findings show that some of the cultures encourage achievement in the sampled books more heavily than others. Those societies that emphasize achievement in their books had comparatively higher rates of economic growth, he concludes. But critics fault McClelland wondering whether his approach measures the values taught to children or the values of the text book writers. The postulation that economic growth is partly defined by cultural factors continues to face considerable academic

resistance. One reason for this type of scenario is because cultural factors are perceived as scattered and enduring features of given societies. So the thinking is that if cultural factors influence economic growth then economic development is futile since culture cannot be changed (to boost economic growth in case the earlier cultural factors are underperforming). Another opposing reason is that the standard life cycle model and not cultural factors, is responsible for the difference in saving rates between countries such as United States of America, German and Japan.

If culture is approached as something to be measured on a quantitative empirical dimension, the illusion of perceiving it as scattered and permanent vanishes. Instead, we can move to evaluate particular components of a particular culture at a specific time and place devoid of gross stereotypes such as "Germans are known for militaristic tendencies" or that "Chinese are traditionally hardworking." Instead more empirical data is worthwhile, for example, that the period between 1945 and 1975, West Germany's political culture experienced a notable transformation from being dictatorial to becoming visibly democratic and participatory (Baker, Dalton & Hildebrandt, 1981). It is also empirically true of United States America and Western European societies that experienced intergenerational change from materialist to post-materialist value priorities. Empirical research is necessary to help identify specific elements of culture that can be roped into economic growth without threatening the target society with culture overhaul. This is not about an attempt to change society's way of life by stamping on it certain predetermined value. Research shows that achievement motivation is suitable to economic growth rates. Since culture is dynamic and changes, influencing parents and other socialization agents on potential relevant factors could as well be a good beginning point. Cultural variables matter in growth models. An evaluation on how cultural and motivational factors can be used to supplement the existing economic models is advisable to help uncover conceptualization of economic growth.

Researchers such as Richerson & Boyd, 2005 have assembled a rich of field evidence on the effect of culture on economic direction. Research shows, for instance, that in southern Illinois, towns inhabited by the descendents of the German-Catholic who settled there in the mid nineteenth century and urban centres inhabited by descendents of the Yankee settlers from other areas of the United States such as Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky manifested significant differences in the structure of land ownership, farming methods, types of crops to cultivate, and female fertility. German-Catholics did not sell their land and had comparatively more children than the Yankees, and so tended to grow crops that required more labour-intensive in which case they employed their children. Yankees, on the other hand, saw farming as an economic activity, for, they traded in buying and selling of land. The Yankees more often, grew less labor-demanding crops such as corn and had fewer children in spite of the



similarity of environmental conditions with their German-Catholic. The notable result of this was that as much as the Yankees were comparatively more entrepreneur and profitable, the German-Catholic model did not degenerate to less prevalent economic option after more than a century, because of the higher reproductive fertility of German Catholics. It is clear that culture had an effect as well as the persistence of this effect over time despite its lower profitability. This experience has encouraged economists to apply their analytical and empirical tools to determine the place of culture in economic performance.

Arts and culture are important options for cushioning economies and providing economic benefits to the people they serve. They can create job opportunities, attract direct and indirect investments and generate tax revenues to the government as well as stimulate local economies through such aspects as tourism and consumer purchases. Arts and culture can enhance quality lives by contributing to and enhancing local amenities and attracting the most talented and young professionals to an area.

In order to harness culture the starting point for policy makers would be to demonstrate a clear understanding of a country's cultural industries. It is necessary for each African country to measure its creative economy from the lowest units such as ethnic ones to bigger units at the county then national. Each country has unique enterprises in many of these creative industries and knowledge of where these enterprises are located and what they contribute to a community's economy is a critical first step towards using creative industries as economic development tools.

It is possible for African countries to map their arts and cultural assets. This mapping process would involve: first, engaging an ongoing inventory of arts assets; second, performing a cluster analysis and; third, documenting and archiving arts industry data which most sub-Saharan African countries have not done yet. To determine the contributions to potential importance of arts and culture on a country's economy, it is prudent for each country to engage deliberate efforts that would see commissions put up to do this. These commissions should provide funding and expertise assistance to the communities to identify, monitor and evaluate local events, artists, traditions and tradition sages as well as cultural organizations that promote these arts and culture. Once collected, the information is used to define the local economic development agenda and tourism initiatives as well as coordinate local and national cultural-economic development efforts. Case studies could also provide useful insight into a country's cultural industries by illuminating on the economic impact of specific industries and the needs of various economic clusters. In addition to industry mapping, African countries should establish and maintain a repository of useful information and data on the arts and culture industries which can help inform national economic development agenda. As a result, this process will provide comprehensive information about the country's creative sector. The creative economy

encapsulates tourism, lifestyle wellness, agriculture and agribusiness, technology, and spiritualism.

The need for clusters in mapping the creative economy is important. Cluster analysis is a critical tool for the national leadership to evaluate the performance of clusters within their country and ensure that the national policy best enables this performance. Cluster analysis standardizes clusters within one country to other countries within or outside the African continent based on the relative growth or decline of creative economy deliverables such as employment.

There is need for accurate measurement of the impact of creative economy as an offshoot of culture. Despite the central role that arts and culture play in a country's economic wellness, studies in economics hardly recognize the role of culture on national economies in most countries on the African continent. It is worth noting that many arts organizations and groups and not-for-profit making are, therefore, not visible in job-creation data or in the studies of the creative industry. These outfits which include a wide range of performing groups, arts centres, art theatres, museums, festivals and school programmes—are useful to include in the overall analysis, for, they serve as assets for attracting and retaining the creative class and provide aesthetic value to the community.

In addition to the above, there is need to incorporate culture into a national planning: African countries can use the information tapped from mapped and analyzed cultural assets to devise economic development strategies that connect the economic benefits of the cultural industries on national basis. These strategies summarize the value of cultural aspects to a country and identify new frontiers for more engaging initiatives. The key elements of good planning undertaking are leadership and what the stakeholders offer and whether they agree on a clear vision or not. The success of planning efforts involves seeking input from interested parties in marking out the right people to lead. A common undertaking is to nominate a special taskforce to take charge. Once a country has put together a leadership body, the group then must develop a specific plan to integrate arts and culture into the country's economic development efforts as the country's vision. The convening role of national leadership through colloquium and workshops is perhaps one of the most visible strategies for generating awareness of the value of the arts and culture and encouraging subsequent action within the general public.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

African countries can

- i. Support individual creative artists: individual artists are important producers of goods and services in every country's cultural economy. It is through their work that cultural goods are produced, small businesses are started and innovation design ideas enter into the market place. To support this role, many countries could

use small grants to encourage entrepreneurship, innovative product development and career advancement among artists and culture experts.

- ii. Support partnerships and education services: countries can play a crucial role in connecting arts enterprises, artists and entrepreneurs through partnerships that promote education and resource sharing. Countries could launch networks through institutions of higher learning such as universities to provide direct funding assistance for artists and economic development projects executed through such partnerships.
- iii. Give the arts a competitive edge in entrepreneurship: Arts and culture can be used to support businesses in other industries especially in advertisements product designs. This calls for the need of collaboration among artists and designers in a variety of manufacturing and top notch technology industries. This collaboration will spur new thinking and encourage new product development.

The following are specific strategies recommended for incorporation at community level:

- i. Provide planning grants and training to communities
- ii. Create cultural enterprises zones by designating them as creative communities to promote exemplary local efforts
- iii. Support the development of art space to ensure availability of specialized talents
- iv. Coordinate and support cultural tourism at the national level to give potential visitors a central resource for information of the available arts and artists.
- v. Promote distinct cultural products such as basketry, sculpture, food, furniture, pottery
- vi. Market cultural events
- vii. Promote unique destinations

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to argue that culture matters in economic development. Starting with casual personal and group experience to formal analysis, it is manifest that culture impacts on economic development outcomes. Economies that appear to disregard culture illustrate measurable consequences. In order to integrate culture into economic development, care has to be taken not to disrupt or blow certain cultural aspects out of proportion with the end result of overhauling that culture. There should be a systematic integration of culture into development economic agenda. Cultural values have a decisive implication on economic development. But as we have seen there has been an intellectual discourse on the types of values to be integrated into the economy to help such countries attain sustained growth and profitable social achievements. Research recognizes the significance of cultural aspects to the development of partnership with the

international community and this explains why China has scored higher on the cultural and economic front than most of its competitors. China has comparatively stronger cultural partnerships with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore which are industrialized economies. However, it would be naïve to argue that Confucianism as a cultural aspect is the only answer to China's past economic success. So & Chiu (1995) argue that, instead, culture relates development policy and institutional options to certain cultural antecedents that impact of economic development. The cultural perspective gives researchers a frame of reference within which they can see how values, attitudes have influenced economic development.

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