

The Effects of Cultural Practices and Knowledge Systems on Community Development

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Abstract

Culture and knowledge systems are important for community development. Culture characterizes us as human-beings and members of a community. A country rich, strong and powerful country as Nigeria is made up of diverse cultural practices, ethnic groups and knowledge systems that help in shaping her day-to-day live and activities. Knowledge systems held by most communities are based on their experience and adaptation to their culture, education, crafts, religion, theatre, natural resources management arts, dance and music. This paper adopted the secondary data design in eliciting relevant information to buttress the topic considered. The purpose of this paper is to attempt the effects of cultural practices and knowledge systems on community development. In conclusion, this paper suggests that community leaders, policymakers and relevant bodies must take up actions that preserve these cultural practices and knowledge systems that help in community development.

Keywords: effects, cultural practices, Knowledge systems, community development, social work

Management Insight (2020). DOI: 10.21844/mijia.16.1.2

Introduction

Culture characterizes us as human-beings and members of a community. A country rich, strong and powerful country as Nigeria is made up of diverse cultural practices, ethnic groups and knowledge systems that help in shaping her day-to-day live and activities. As a blessed nation, Nigeria has rich culture, embedded in beliefs, folklore, medicine, religion, age grading, marriage and education. Culture is essential for the existence of a society because it binds people together. In the explicit sense of the term, culture constitutes the music, food, arts and literature of a society. Culture plays a vast role in community development. Take for instance, the health sector of any community depends on its culture. Culture determines what people eat, how they prepare their food and how they treat themselves (Akomolafe, 2018). Also it determines how a people relate to their environment and shapes how they commune with their ancestors and their gods. Culture is not only a means of communication between people, but it helps, through shared identities, to create a feeling of belonging and togetherness among people in the society (Akomolafe, 2018). It is also through a culture that the entire knowledge-base of a people is transmitted

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How to cite this article: Ngowari, G.B., Chris N.,N., Mina, Q. (2020). The Effects of Cultural Practices and Knowledge Systems on Community Development. Management Insight, 16(2)9-16

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None

Received: 26.02.2020; **Accepted:** 06.04.2021; **Published:** 14.07.2021

from generation to generation. Culture related undertakings contribute to an increase in the intellectual potential of communities and the building of conscious, open and tolerant community members (Tylus, 2014). For emphasis, culture is a base for initiating cooperation and human communications, performing numerous education functions and thereby activating various layers of community development (Tylus, 2014).

Knowledge systems on the other hand refer to the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by communities with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. This knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life. Knowledge systems are held by traditional communities and it is literally based on their experience and

adaptation to a local culture and environment (Makinde, & Shorunke, 2013). This knowledge is integral to a cultural complex that also encompasses language, systems of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, ritual and spirituality. These unique ways of knowing are important facets of the world's cultural diversity, and provide a foundation for locally-appropriate sustainable development. Furthermore, these knowledge systems are ingrained as part of the cultural practices that aid in community development. Knowledge systems are formed from experiences, past custom, religion, community laws, and the attitudes of the community in general.

Furthermore, every culture has its knowledge system which most times appear in form of oral communication. They are not necessarily written down but they are transferred from one generation to another. Moahi (2012) concisely averred that the importance of knowledge systems to community development has been established over the years. Knowledge systems are built up by members of the community through generations living in close contact with each other. It is stored in people's memories and is expressed in stories, songs, folklore, proverbs and myths (Kargbo, 2005; Ilo, 2012). Knowledge systems originate from a body of knowledge which has accumulated from individuals who have lived in a community over a period of time. Ancestors orally hand over these peculiar information's to the younger generations (Ilo, 2012). It is through knowledge systems that communities express their cultures, languages and belief patterns acquired as a result of their interaction and integration with one another. The importance of knowledge systems is of great importance to community development. Hence, this paper aims at examining the impact of cultural practices and knowledge systems on community development.

Clarification of terms

Culture: Taylor (1871) saw culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs or any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. "Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habitats, music and arts" (Zimmermann, 2015).

Cultural practices: These refer to the demonstration of a culture of people particularly in regard to traditional and habitual patterns of social interactions, behaviors and activities undertaken by an ethnic group (Kiriro, 2011).

Cultural values: These are guides of behaviour that entail the commonly upheld standards of what is acceptable or unacceptable, right or wrong in a society (Belfiore, 2012).

Knowledge system: This is that type of knowledge that is peculiar to a people, culture, setting and system.

Community development: Community development entails the processes by which community members come together to take collective actions and generate solutions to a common identified problem (Ifeyani, 2006).

How cultural practices and knowledge systems impacted community development

Culture links us to our historical past. It spells a particular way of people's behaviour, ways of acting and thinking. Culture also defines the value system, customs, education and knowledge of a people. Culture is the vehicle through which knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits are transmitted to members of a community from generation to generation" (Ogohi, 2014). Additionally, knowledge systems play major roles in the development of any community. The basic component of knowledge systems is the community's indigenous knowledge. This indigenous knowledge comprised of the skills, experiences and insights of people, used to improve their livelihood in the community (Ilo, 2012). Knowledge systems help develop communities through the production of food, acquiring of education/vocational skills and conservation of natural environment (Anyira & Nwabueze, 2010). This knowledge enables members of the community acquire skills needed to live a better life and adapt effectively.

In most communities, oral information is directly linked with efficiency, development and progress. It is risky to ignore any authentic and reliable information, be it in oral or printed format (Okoro, 2010). According to

Mabawonku (2005), these knowledge systems form the basis for local level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, music, arts, crafts, natural resources management, festivals and a host of other activities in the communities. Historical, these forms of knowledge were inculcated by observing what the elderly ones did. This form of transmission from the elders to the younger generation was done through story-telling, observation and experiments. The community developed through young boys and girls learning the do's and don'ts from their elders through experiments (Ilo, 2012). For instance it was a taboo for a man and a woman to share the same buckets in Abuloma community of Rivers state Nigeria. As a young growing child you would observe what your mother does and follow suit. This helped in maintaining some order in the family (Gobo, 2019). Again, Eze and Mba (2013) observed that children learnt through dance and folk songs. Music formed an integral part of their daily lives. Proverbs were used widely in ordinary conversation. A judicious use of proverbs was usually regarded as a sign of wit. Proverbs were the condensed wisdom of the great ancestors (Eze, & Mba, 2013). In a given proverb one or two moral ideas were contained in a single sentence. Most of them referred to different aspects of socio-economic and political life. Traditional learning also involved the use of deterrence or inculcating fear in children. They were made to conform to the morals, customs and standards of behaviour inherent in the clan (Eze, & Mba, 2013). Bad habits and undesirable behaviour, such as; disobedience, cruelty, selfishness, bullying, aggressiveness, temper tantrums, theft and telling lies were not usually tolerated. Verbal warnings were used and more often followed by punishment. Children who committed offences might be rebuked, smacked or assigned some piece of work to complete before being allowed to eat. Serious offences and disciplinary problems, however, resulted in severe beating or other forms of inflicting pain on the body (Eze, & Mba, 2013). These measures prevented unwholesome behaviours in the community and it saw to the adverse development of the community.

Areas in which cultural practices and knowledge systems impacts community development

Leadership

Traditionally, communities depend on leadership to see

to the day to day affairs of the community. Most often they are known as the Igwe's in the East, the Oba's in the West and the Amayanabo's in the South. But the most significant thing about the traditional society is that the political hierarchy begins with the family (Idang, 2015). Each family has a family head; each village has a village head. From these, we have clan head and above the clan head, is the paramount ruler. This kind of political arrangement is observable in the Southern part of Nigeria. Prior to the coming of Western colonisation and its subsequent subversion of the African traditional political arrangements, African societies had their council of chiefs, advisers, cult groups, and so on. It was believed that disloyalty to a leader was disloyalty to God and the position of leadership was either hereditary or by conquest. In Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, for instance, even though the traditional leadership institution was overwhelmingly totalitarian, there were still some checks and balances. Any ruler who attempted to usurp powers was beheaded by the Ekpo cult (Antia, 2005).

Health

Knowledge systems have helped in healthcare delivery of community members. Knowledge on the use of plants, herbs or roots for the treatment of all kinds of ailments has helped in community development. In years of yore, our parents treated every manner of illness, sickness and injuries with herbal medicines they mixed from the leaves, roots, and barks of the plants in their forest (Akomolafe, 2018). Some of the indigenous medical practices prevalent in most Nigerian communities are: heat therapy for treatment of fever, bone setting, use of 'obiálu-ofuu' leaves for malaria treatment, chewing of bitter leaf to quash stomach problems among others (Ila, 2012). Also, in terms of child birth and child delivery process, the Traditional birth attendants have done a great deal in attending to the needs of these women. Also, spiritual massagers who were said to be gifted in arranging the babying and massaging the pregnant woman to ensure she is safe and the baby too was also on high demand. Their gifting helped in setting the womb, preventing miscarriages, and abridged babies. Although today modernization has made them to be replaced by physiotherapist, yet in the riverine areas majority of these women still exist. Some see it as a skill inherited from their ancestors while others see it as a natural gift to help people (Gobo, 2019). In Youruba land Makinde (2007) posited that among the

people of South-Western Nigeria, the practice of traditional or alternative medical practitioners is established. Makinde (2007) further highlighted the presence of specialists in gynecology and absterics (isegun alaboyun ati isegun ajemabo); sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (aarunIbalopo), rheumatism (san-an-gun-san-an-gun); typhoid fever (iba jefunjefun); tuberculosis(jedoledo) cholera (onigba-meji); hookworm aran jagbaya); whooping cough (iko lileomode); small pox (olode) among the Yoruba's. The knowledge from this practice helped in maintaining a peaceful co-existence of community members. This form of knowledge was often transferred from older to young generation through inheritance (Lwoga, Ngulube & Stlwil, 2010).

Religion

Religion is an important cultural practice strictly adhered to by members of the community. Often time's religion forms the norms and belief systems of the community. Most communities fulfill ritual and spiritual obligations to maintain law and order in the community (Paden, 2009). Religion is fundamental and possibly the most powerful component of culture that influences the lives of community members (Awolalu, 2006). Religion, which was concerned with morality, it gave support to the laws and customs of the community and to its accepted rules of conduct which included; courtesy, generosity and honesty (Eze, & Mba, 2013). Also, religion had much to do with moral and ethical principles, such as conduct of one individual towards another and the relations of the individual to the community. Individuals had to learn when to use or avoid ancestral spirits and other mysterious powers for the sake of their survival. They had to learn to appreciate the ties between the living members of the clan and the dead or ancestral spirits of their visible world (Eze, & Mba, 2013).

Ancestral worship is the core of Nigerian indigenous religious belief. Various communities and their belief are reflected in the worship of ancestral spirits. It is believed that these spirits act as intermediaries between the community and god (Ila, 2012). They also hold a strong belief that ancestors communicate with individuals. As a result, communities engaged in some practices like pouring libation during naming

ceremonies, throwing kola lobes on the ground for ancestors to eat. Others include killing and spilling the blood of animals on the ground during burials so that their dead will be received by their ancestors. Animals are also used in cleansing as a way of making atonement for sins. Also, Sorcerers and diviners are seen to be mediating between God and man and interpreting God's wishes to the mortal. The diviners, sorcerers and soothsayers help to streamline human behaviour in the society and people are afraid to commit offences because of the fear of being exposed by the diviners and sorcerers (Idang, 2015).

Agricultural Practices

Community knowledge systems facilitate agriculture and its practices in Nigeria. Through this knowledge, communities are been developed. They are able to decide the most appropriate time to clear the bush for farming. Farmers are able to determine the best periods for land clearing and other preparations required before planting of crops. Community members also engaged in indigenous methods of weeding, pest control and the use of household manure to enrich the soil. Indigenous agriculture involves manual practices.

In Ekiti, South West of Nigeria, Bamigboye and Kuponiyi (2010) described indigenous agricultural practices in the cultivation of rice where rice farmers engaged in knowledge systems. They discovered that the most patronized indigenous knowledge under land preparation and management is bush slashing without burning, bush fallow, shifting cultivation, use of hoe and cutlass for weeding. For the control of termites, the most utilized methods are burying of carbide on the farm and the use of effluent of locust bean solution. For grass cutter control, the fanners set traps and use mixture of lime and gun powder. Birds are controlled through the use of scare crows and use of traditional medicine. In some Eastern part of Nigeria, indigenous food preservation and storage practices are also in place. Specific farm products are preserved till the next planting season. Particular species of cocoyam when harvested are cooked, peeled and sundried. In the course of the year, it is ground with mortar, soaked in hot water, tied in wet plantain leaves, cooked and eaten with fresh palm oil and vegetable. It is preserved to serve as a relief between planting and next harvesting season (Ilo, 2012).

The Family

In the indigenous Nigerian system, the family is at the centre of indigenous social system. Relations outside the nuclear family are still treated with due care and given attention when in need. Sisters, brothers, grand and great-grand parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, sisters, in-laws, step brothers and sisters all participate as members of the indigenous family. Mutual respect exists, even though seniority and hierarchy serve as guiding principles. Social standing and recognition are achieved through extended families. The behavior of individual members of the family brings honour or dishonour to the entire family as the case may be. The family has the responsibility of caring for individual members as the need arises (Ilo, 2012).

The marriage institution is very important in Nigeria. It is an integral part of every indigenous community. It is an affair which later brings two families together. Indigenous communities have different ways of giving out their children in marriage. Nigerian marriage remains a family affair where the family gets involved in all activities ranging from the introduction to the time the woman gets settled in her new home. Polygamy is dominant in Nigerian indigenous marriage. However, many men still resolve to marry and live with only one woman throughout their lifetime. A mature male and female who love each other and have agreed to get married always need to get their parents involved. In the South Eastern part of Nigeria, marriage starts when a man is mature and desires to have a wife. Such a man tells his parents that he has seen a good person to marry or asks them to help him search for one. Whether it is the man or his parents that first finds one, the girl's family is informed. The families begin to make enquiries as to the antecedents and genealogy of each other. Indigenous inquiries may include consulting some elderly people whom it is believed have information about the past. While the girl's parents make serious investigations about the boy's family, the boy's family members carry out their own investigation in the opposite direction. If the investigations prove successful, the parents of the boy and some elders, at this initial contact go with kola nuts and palm wine to meet the girl's parents. This is called 'manya ajuju' (investigation wine). In the process of this initial visit, the would-be bride drinks part of the palm wine, and gives the remaining part to her suitor, it

means that she has accepted the suitor and so the two parties can go ahead to talk about the bride price and other marriage rites. The next important stage is the "manyanna" (father's wine). This is strictly for the bride's father and immediate family members. Thereafter, a date is fixed for the big wine (manya shinne). On the set day, friends and relations of the bridegroom on one hand and the would-be-bride's relations on the other are invited to witness the great occasion. The would-be groom and his parents carry several pots of palm wine, kola nuts, and snuff to the would-be-in-laws family. The wine is drunk by the bride and groom's extended families, relations and friends. At the end of the day, the girl is free to follow her husband to know her new home (Ila, 2012).

Music and Dance

Indigenous music and dance is characterized by powerful rhythm. This rhythm emanates from indigenous instruments which include the metal gong, drum, ichaka and music pot. Music is performed during public functions, coronations, traditional marriage funerals, naming ceremonies, festivals. Different ethnic groups perform various kinds of dances. Gbagbankolobia dance is a very popular one by Udi indigenes of Enugu State. As they stretch their two hands in front of them, they wriggle their waist and jump up and down to people's admiration. It shows their value system and children also imbibe this as they grow. In Tivland, women have a major dance used in the resolution of conflicts which involve members of their ethnic groups or those from other ethnic groups (Ila, 2012).

Communication

Important information relating to life in the community such as farming, festivals, customs, taboos, etc is often conveyed during well organized feasts and communal festivals. Though the major reasons for organizing such festivals are to entertain the community, it is also used as a forum to pass relevant information across to the entire community. Drama, poems, music and songs used in education and entertainment also become means of passing information on the methods of cooking, better ways of living, dressing, peace keeping and all other information required for proper co-existence in the society (Ila, 2012). Indigenous method of

communication also serves as a means of correcting some ills inherent in the society. Town criers also cry round the community to disseminate information especially, those that require urgent attention. They move round the community in the evenings when the indigenes have returned from their farms and market. Sometimes, village markets are the points of contacts where indigenes get information through the town criers.

Also, In Mbano, indigenous communication takes the form of instruction, announcement, advertising, public relations (goodwill), entertainment, warning, spiritual activities, symbolic display and information. The materials or instruments used for these forms of communication include metal gong (ogene), wooden gong (ekwe), flute (opi), fist flute (opi-aka), reed pipe (opi-achara), fist, eyes and palmfrond. Central to all these instruments is the town-crier, who Ugboaja (1979) referred to as gongman. It was noticed from the study that the whole human body or parts of it can be applied in indigenous communication. This is regarded as symbolic display (Nwosu, 2013). For instance, the shaving of head to the skin depicts mourning among the people of Mbano. The people of Mbano believe that indigenous media are mostly used for funeral announcement, environmental sanitation, marriage ceremonies, advertisement of local wares, development projects, farm work, warning, information and public relations activities (Nwosu, 2013).

Arts and Craft

Nigeria is blessed with a rich cultural heritage. This manifests in indigenous art and craft, and practices like bead making, pottery, knitting, basket making, molding, jewelry. Others include brass and iron work, crafts, jewellery, leather textiles, pottery and ceramics. Apart from weaving, Nigerians produce very beautiful and colourful textiles through the art of tie and dye. The city of Ife is famous for bronze carvings. Similarly, Abeokuta town in Ogun State is well known for its beautiful designs on tie and dye. These unique works of art are being preserved in major world museums till date (Ilo, 2012). Major Nigerian artworks are preserved in various National Museums. Different countries of the world also acquire and preserve same in their museums.

Education

Communities believed so much in imparting what is worth-while to the younger generation through imitation. Traditional beliefs and life styles as well as other aspects of their cultures are passed on to younger generations. Through observation and imitation, they learn respect for elders, weather forecasting, animal husbandry, wrestling, building techniques. Girls imbibe the culture of personal hygiene, child care, dancing steps, cooking and home care from their mothers (Ilo, 2012). All these constitute education but outside the formal school environment. This helped in community development.

Any hope for the preservation of knowledge systems and our cultures that shaped behavioral patterns in the community

Historically, the importance of knowledge systems cannot be overemphasized because it had a great impact on community development. Every community has its own knowledge system, which enables it to survive, relate and make sense of its context and environment (Makinde, & Shorunke, 2013). Recent trend in modernization which has seen to the existence of ICT, FACEBOOK, Instagram etcetera has done more harm than good to communities in terms of their cultural practices and knowledge system preservations. Also, there is the increase in the lack of preservation of these cultural practices and knowledge systems can be blamed on how the many bearers of indigenous knowledge are from the older generation and now it is difficult to communicate their beliefs and practices to the scientifically educated younger generation; once the older generation passes away, the knowledge disappears with them. This folklore, customs, etiquette and music that formed part of knowledge systems can be recorded on tapes and written in book form and stored in the libraries (Stevens, 2008).

Examples of modern day lifestyles and knowledge systems practices

1. Jungle justice for those who are caught stealing
2. Fourteen years jail term for those caught in homosexuality
3. Calling out through social media handles

4. Structured open letters

Conclusion

Culture contributes evenly to a balanced, sustained and developed community. It is the existing cultural practices and beliefs that form the knowledge of each community which is handed down from generation to generation. This makes it an important factor to consider when we talk about community development as social workers. The aim of social workers is not to destroy the cultural practices and belief of the people which they formed through their existing knowledge systems, but rather what a social worker desires is to maintain the core values of the profession and ensure that everyone enjoys the life they live. This community development social workers can achieve if they understand that culture and knowledge systems of the people provide use ful frameworks, ideas, guiding principles, procedures and practices that can serve as a foundation for achieving social and economic development of communities and the world at large. Therefore, social workers, community leaders, policymakers and relevant bodies must take up actions that preserve these cultural practices and knowledge systems that help in community development.

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