

Cultural Heritage and the Social Dynamics of Building Strong Institutions in Nigeria



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ABSTRACT: Several scholarly debates have proven the fact that, without solid Social Institutions, a society cannot realize even the basic societal task of growth and sustainable development. In a situation such as this, the tendencies for citizenry to tilt towards heinous crimes and other harmful practices would certainly be high. Therefore, interrogating the social dynamics that enable nations realize their past history, know what to preserve and how to connect such with existential realities of contemporary times becomes a necessary proposition especially in Nigeria. From a feminist perspective, if the dominant ideology in social institutions craves for women to be perceived as second fiddle and subservient to men in a society already experiencing Globalization, cultural diffusion and technology, then there will be suppression of the female gender, such as inheritance rights. The paper argued that, even in contemporary times, the Nigerian nation still lacks solid Social Institutions, and by means of that still struggling to adapt to new cultural conditions with dominant ideology that can help maintain powerful social, economic and political interest for both sexes. Needless to say that, in recent decades, there has been a lot of exchange of ideas and concepts, through a worldwide integration of cultures, social movements; government policies that the Nigerian nation is yet to key into. Using qualitative descriptive analysis of primary and secondary data centered on conflict theory which lays emphasis on the importance of interest over norms and values and how societies are characterized by inequality, the paper assert that, strong Social Institutions as mechanisms of social order should be encouraged to produce social needs such as family, education, healthcare, religion, and politics.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Heritage, Gender Disparity, Ideology, Institutions, Social Dynamics

INTRODUCTION

There is the obnoxious classical colonial prejudice that the African peoples, nay Nigeria, have no past, nor history, no culture, nor civilization, hence, nothing to show for their actuality and existence. It is however heartwarming to note that; Nigeria's encounter with colonialism became an engendering factor upon which she leveraged to doubled her efforts even before political independence towards cultural revival aimed at propagating the values and originality of the African culture. Such physical artifacts and intangible attributes as inherited from past generations is been preserved (sometimes modified to suit the changing times) for future generations for purposes of integration and continuity. This is a strong indication that Nigeria has always had a past, history, and/or cultural identity upon which her tradition and belief system is instituted. In other words, cultural heritage which is a way of articulating living standards, developed through community institutions and passed on from generation to generation cannot be taken for granted as it has aided in shaping our (Nigerian) identity especially in modern times. This is simply because; "history is to a people what memory is to an individual. A people with no knowledge of their past would suffer collective amnesia, groping blindly into the future without guideposts of precedence to shape their course. Only a thorough awareness of their heritage allows them to make their public decisions as they make their private ones" (Fafunwa, as cited in Dauda, 2012). Thus, the behaviour of groups and the interactions of individual groups as members of society are very significant to the direction upon which a people can be appreciated and understood within a social system. Still leveraging on Fafunwa's supposition, one is encouraged to lay more emphasis on the fact that; beyond patriarchy, Nigeria as a nation has continued to harness socio-cultural values and sustainable development initiatives upon which the structure and social mechanism of her institutions are expected to thrive. And that; over the years, these institutions have strived, perhaps not yet strong enough to maintain social order, promote economic/political development, as well as the preservation of our cultural heritage within the ambit of gender equity.

In today's context, it is essential to understand that in building strong and focused institutions, we must first understand the socio/cultural context upon which a person, organism, or groups responds to specific sets of conditions and/or that which human behaviour could occur. This is because it is this social milieu otherwise described as the immediate physical and social environment of an individual that influences to a large extent, the actions and feelings that occur within it. In other words, we must begin to understand the culture of the society, be it cultural hegemony, cultural colonialism or cultural imperialism in which all the social

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actions take place with a view to restructuring such cultural power. It is within this vein, that the study strives to explore the essence of cultural heritage, and how strong and focused institutions can be used to direct human progression as an interventionist strategy that has remained highly controversial. Our reasoning is simply in harmony with Steinfeld's, (2013:101) which states that; "To rule society, the ruling class must draw support from intellectuals and cultural institutions to make its ethics, politics and cultural values a universally accepted code of conduct and make the broad masses of the people freely agree with the social lifestyle of the basic ruling group". This is not in any way to allow for the reckless destruction of local histories and civilizations.

As a concept, cultural heritage must tend towards creating a bridge between the past and the future with the application of particular approaches in the present. The study also attempts to understand the processes in certain institutions in terms of the range of standard social factors such as the levels and distribution of income, levels of education, position of women, religion, and economic development. Regrettably, these institutions tend to be weak or deliberately disposed and favourable to the male gender in most African nations, Nigeria inclusive.

Social Institutions and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The importance of social institutions in the society cannot be overemphasized, especially as they serve as the spine upon which the intricacies of society are being coxswained in order to achieve fulfilment in terms of economy, understanding and defining relationships. In fact, they serve as established structures upon which countless facets of social conduct and their interactions are progressively systematized to provide a framework aimed at providing regulation in order to diminish conflict within society. In an all – encompassing explanation, Ododo, (2020:13-12) re-echoes this situation thus:

Institution building is NOT essentially about physical structure but etched out values and grand norms that are well respected, upheld and accepted as part of an enduring system irrespective of the political or personal views of the occupant of an office. It is the value attached to an institution and the level of compliance of its guiding operational rules and regulations that determine its strength or weakness. An institution is as strong as the people who believe in it, submit willingly to its operational norms and uphold and defend its sanctity. Institution building therefore requires great cultural and ethical support from the society because it is the society that builds the institution. Extant is the fact that institutions are collectively owed and protected.

In other words, the existence of social institutions in any given society is to fundamentally provide rules and regulations, as well as guidance and order in such a society with the view to influencing gender and racial norms. The intention is to offer social sustainability, promote and include the poor and vulnerable people in society through empowerment and building cohesive and revered establishments that would be accessible and accountable to all gender. The reason for this is simply that; unsustainable production and consumption arrangements are gendered, with women mischievously positioned at the receiving end. It is observed today that, due to fragile and misjudged institutions in Nigeria, women in both domestic circle and society have continued to be unnoticed in the scheme of things.

It is worthy to note at this point some patterns of social institutions (male dominated) shaped by gender relations to the advantage of men to include among others, the family, education, religion, government, legal system, economy, health care, and media through which Nigeria as a nation can be pragmatic about, as well as are strategic in strengthening certain thriving and robust cultural heritage that are critical in influencing human lives. In effect, this has become crucial for the reason that, though they (social institutions) convey values that are required for maintaining social cohesion and prevention of chaos especially that within the Nigerian workforce and civic life, the experience of upholding ancient traditional culture is still predominantly overpowering.

It is indeed the effect of the activities of these institutions in social interactions to prevent people from attaining personal growth, indulging in crime and other ill-disposed actions that we see as inimical to the steadiness and continuity of the human society. This is in consideration of the fact that; the Nigerian society and its institutions are the reason for why sustainable development through a collective bargain would provide more opportunities of meaningful socialization, resources, culture transmission, personal development and connecting relationships. Therefore, it behooves on the Nigerian nation to develop organized patterns of beliefs, norms, traditions and behaviour that are devoid of patriarchal mentality in order to collectively add value to the social needs of the people. Thus, our social institutions should seek the creation of equal opportunities and to jettison discrimination in terms of inheritance rights as it effect especially the female gender. In this century, one would have thought that the era of the 1960s and 1970s where "women had no direct relationship to the law outside of their relationships as daughters or wives; in particular, married women lost property rights upon marriage" (2001:7) should be discountenanced. Even so, Boyce-Davies as cited in Okolocha, (2022:28) argues that "because African societies are ancient societies, African feminism must situate itself historically and recognise the existence, in some societies, **of structures that grant women equality**" (emphasis mine). Agreeing with Boyce-Davies point

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of view in a way is another school of thought that reminds us of the high level of participation and activism of African women in the pre-colonial period. The point been made here is that: “Historically, women did not occupy an inferior place in society until when the primitive – communal society broke down into classes, and with the introduction of private property, and the family. The function of the woman has since then been that of a breeder, and a possession of her husband” (Obiora-Okoye Onyinye, 2015:53). Institutionalizing therefore through a gender-biased social structure such as family, class system, or any other is brashness meant to encourage male dominance which is responsible for the subjugation of women in society. Also of concern here is that; any burgeoning of class structure and private property would naturally repudiate any form of production output that should be collectively owned by both gender. In this way, we are inspired with the strong desire to seek improvement and integration on the conditions of the women’s lives in the Nigerian society through focused regulations and policies. For example, through Social Support and Welfare Plan of Action, certain social dynamics militating against the vulnerable and disadvantaged women can be tackled from side to side by providing assistance and resources which will address the issue of social inequalities, and encourage social inclusion.

Inheritance Rights in Male Dominant Ideology

Despite the widespread interest, studies of attitudes and behaviours towards the female gender even in contemporary times are not new to scholarship, yet the issues continue to linger. The problem will indeed continue to hang back as long as issues of inheritance rights in a male dominant system of social beliefs (cultural hegemony) continue to remain fashionable. In Nigeria, even at this time, the belief that land for example belongs to all and sundry is taken for granted, because customary law as an institution still provides certain ill-disposed clauses and/or encumbrances for inheritance/succession practice affecting the female gender. It is obvious that in most African nay Nigerian cultures the notion is clear that; ancestral property is passed through the male-line almost all the times. This draws attention to the fact that women are not only excluded in the scheme of things, but stereotypically and historically marginalized.

Sadly so, it is simply understandable that this pattern or template of social dynamics can only encourage and propagate gender inequality, thereby limiting opportunities for women in such societies. In fact, male and female are perceivably distinct and clearly different in their characteristics; these characteristics are not generally viewed as being of comparable value to society. Unger, (1979: 35) gives credence to this point by asserting that: “Men and masculine characteristics are more highly valued than women and feminine characteristics. Male characteristics are considered to be more socially desirable by members of both sexes. In fact, male properties appear to form the referent point of personhood in our society”. Invariably, the law of succession which transmit the rights and obligations of a deceased person over his/her property to his/her successors in Nigeria is overwhelmingly patrilineal. One can perceive from this perspective that the creation of patriarchy from end to end has actually maintain a malevolent posture and an all-powerful-force going against the status and agency of women in the Nigerian society. Indeed, it confirms the explanation that inheritance rights are traced through male descent thereby ignoring the position and participation of the female gender in community sociality. Against this backdrop therefore, the study frowns at the instrumental role of patriarchy as a social system with characteristic such as; dominance, competition, aggression and decisiveness, hence the need for women to reinforce quizzing on this dominance. It is on the strength of this that the journey to deconstruct this gratuitous dominance by women themselves should assume a renewed commitment and clamour upon which institutions that are intense in impression will adjust their focus by design in order to provide a clear vision to the sensibilities of the female gender in Nigeria. From this perspective therefore, it becomes imperative that the sovereign leadership of most African nations must begin to lend their voices in the roadmap to strengthening the social dynamics that would revitalize the existing systemic social interaction between sexes. Giving concreteness to this line of thought, Obiora-Okoye, (2015:54) stresses further that: “In other for women to overcome oppression and marginalization, women should fight for reforms within the existing status-quo, reforms that will give them better deals such as legal changes, and the promotion of equal opportunities, allowing women have access to things on the same terms as men”. It is equally becoming clear that women need to start populating male-dominated occupation like politics/leadership with the view of mounting pressure on the seeming deconstruction and/or review of most social institutions in Nigeria. Suffice to say that; the so called male dominant ideology should be reexamined in order for the complete integration of the women in the scheme of affairs.

This is because the role of gender in building strong institutions with insights and equal opportunities for collaboration and contributing to the cultural relations agenda cannot be neglected in contemporary times. There is the need to stimulate new ways of connecting with and understanding one another through enhanced, strong, purposeful and valued institutions. This is owing to the fact that the world seems to be pigeonholed by all demeanours of gender-based bias without realizing that heightened social institutions can bring about vast benefits in terms of economic and social value. Leveraging on this proposition, Nkama and Ani (2015: 526) in their discourse on “The role of women in building and sustaining the culture of global peace” succinctly opine that:

Different governments of the world should demonstrate love
for their people and exemplify it through a conscious effort
to eradicate poverty, unemployment and class-based struggles
emanating from social inequality and injustice. Religious

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differences and violence needs to be curtailed using the principle of truth, objectivity, equity, forgiveness and reconciliation.

This lofty outlook could create pathways for future opportunities, especially if our institutions are revered and refocused on universal values of respect for human life, more women-friendly policies, evenhandedness, tolerance, human rights and equality between women and men. This presupposes that, continuous explanations of our traditions (institutions) from a malevolent point of view regardless of women's contributions to society would encumber meaningful integration of the female gender into the global system, thereby deepening and retaining inequalities.

Cultural Factors in Social Dynamics

We believe that social dynamics which has to do with the systematic view of social interactions between individuals or social groups, whether as friends, family organizations or even as nations can influence the cultural behaviour of a people at any given time. In this kind of cultural carriage therefore, ideas and ideological beliefs can be useful if adequately harnessed in line with global best practice. Connecting this argument with the experience of colonialism and now globalization and technological advancement, it becomes germane for cultural institutions in Nigeria to double their efforts towards strengthening existing bilateral cultural relationships by way of cultural exchange and diplomacy. This will boost not just our cultural communication and make bold to reaffirm our rediscovered integrity and contributions to world civilization, but moving towards climaxing a cultural revitalization to suit contemporary times. Perhaps it is this opinion that stimulated Asobele's thoughts into averring that: "And unless we take our ways of life and world view seriously ourselves, that is, by promoting them outside our country with our own means, with limited support from extra-African embassies, the advanced nations of the world will not take the Black and African peoples of the world seriously" Asobele, (2002: 10). The gain in this is simply that; cultural power and/or identity are very potent armament within the international circle. From the cultural point of view therefore, the Nigerian nation must begin to not only rectify issues of gender imbalance as is presently demonstrated in most civilized countries of the world, but should enforce existing legislation and encrypting new women-friendly rights into the constitution, in so doing, strengthening our institutions. This to a large extent will offer a bridge between the past and the future using malleable cultural and social means as pillars of sustainable development.

There are cultural issues of values, language, norms and ideologies which guides and influence the behaviour and feelings of humans in a given society. Whereas, cultural dynamics tend to represents the information, maintenance, and transformation of cultures over time through the interactions of individual group members. Owing to the fact that it is these socio/cultural factors that play significant role in shaping social development, the need therefore to restructure traditions, beliefs, patterns and distribution becomes necessary. In the family institution for example, it is observed that a lot of changes both in its formation and internal structures have taken place. Thus, in this period of clamour for globalization, stakeholders in family, parents, school, government, non-governmental organizations' should guarantee complete preservation of constructive values to humanity (Adesina, & Tinuola, 2005). This will not only help in providing reputable value for unique traditional family systems, but will be people oriented and destination bound. It is indeed important to understand this dynamics because it is what affects the socio/cultural, religious, economic, political and environmental issues in any society. In fact, using cultural dynamics, the crucial role in shaping sexual identities, behaviours and perception in contemporary Nigerian society should be reconsidered in line with best practices the world over. This is because all cultures are dynamic and constantly changing to accommodate new ideas, belief system and ideals. Regrettably, it is perhaps in line with this that Oakley cited in Haralambos & Holborn (2008:690) argues that; "there are distinct gender roles for men and women which derives from culture rather than from biology. Gender roles vary from society to society but in all societies they tend to maintain male dominance and female subservience". What we see here is a clear case of cultural influences vis-à-vis reproductive characteristics in an interface with society and the adversarial forces within it, thereby acknowledging that situations of equal value as it concerns women still lags behind that of men. This view is further strengthened by Henderson and Jeydel's assessment of women vis-à-vis work and family in society. They affirm that:

Equal employment policies that address equality issues in the public realm often ignore the fundamental causes that affect men's and women's unequal position in work, politics, and public society. This is particularly true in the areas of balancing production (work) with reproduction (family care). Because women are biologically responsible for activities related to pregnancy and childbirth and still take care of many of the "nurturing" responsibilities of childrearing, they often are unable to compete equally for competitive jobs or perform to their fullest potential. (Henderson, & Jeydel, 2014:111)

This is an indication that gender inequalities through stereotypical portrayals of males and females still persist in our societies due to weak and distorted socio-cultural institutions.

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CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate and attempt a historical reconstruction of cultural heritage, social dynamics and how conscious efforts by policy makers are required to select from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions. Deep-rooted decisions (new policies to strengthen our institutions) that would either help to enforce exiting gendered splitting up of labour into parts to be shared equally between men and women or help redefine them is imminent. In other words, social change and the networks of institutions are sometimes expected to experience modifications and readjustments in order to provide new guidelines for social behaviour and structure. It is hoped that these decisions and directions must strive to accommodate gender and sex role socialization with the view to streamlining gender inequality in society. The reason is simply to rekindle interest into building strong social institutions which are established sets of norms and subsystems meant to strengthen and support society's growth. This is particularly so because, lack of good governance and weak institutional capacity has been identified as undercurrents militating against women's effective participation within the context of their communities where gender roles, and responsibilities are defined at their (women) detriment. Relying on this would necessitate laws, rules, social conventions, and norms repositioned to play vital roles in preserving and promoting our cultural heritage and values in a manner that will recognize them as fulcrum for building spirited and progressive society irrespective of whether as partakers, you are man or woman. This will indeed engender not only understanding, confidence and positive patterns of behaviours among members of society, but will also lead to an entire social construction of developmental process that would diminish gender differences. Strong dynamic institutions would not only keep a modern civil society functioning successfully through a cognitive intellectual order of the mental reasoning of members of society, but will be executed by fulfilment of roles. For that reason, and in whatever role they (women) tend to play now they should continue to seek reforms and equal rights out of what is contained within the exiting status-quo. This is like advocating for a feminist socialist society whereby, a re-organization of these primitive cultural heritage and their usages as they affect the overwhelmingly disadvantaged female gender in terms of the role they play in family, education, religion, politics, economy and health care are addressed to suit contemporary times. This means that sex will no longer be a distinctive feature used as a determinant to decide who plays what role(s) in society; after all, there is the understanding that people are all born equal. Accordingly, this will generate cooperate benefits that will in turn provide stability, continuity and better chances of human survival in a community.

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