

**UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIMENSION OF PEACEBUILDING AND  
CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS IN NIGERIA: A LOOK AT THE OVERLOOKED**

**EGBULE, Philip Onyekachukwu**

*Department of Arts and Social Science Education  
University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria  
pastorp4christ@gmail.com*

**UKOR, Onyeka Destiny, PhD**

*Department of Social Sciences,  
Delta State University, Abraka  
destinyukor@gmail.com*

**&**

**OLORI, Oghogho**

*Department of Arts and Social Science Education,  
University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria.*

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**Abstract**

*Culture had played and will continue to play fundamental roles in the history of humanity. Peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution are one of the unaccomplished tasks of the Nigerian state. Primarily, the imperative of building a culture of peace in Nigeria is the thrust of this paper. Hence, this paper examined how cultural diversity cum ethnic pluralism could be positively harnessed to promote peaceful coexistence, which will subsequently foster inclusive growth and sustainable development in Nigeria. Additionally, the paper identified and addressed the problems of cultural and ethnic pluralism in Nigeria to ensure unity within diversity for a strong, united, virile and democratic society in Nigeria. The main source of information is secondary data such as books, articles, newspapers and journals. The paper calls on all stakeholders in the education, tourism and mass communication industries to exploit the potentials Nigeria's cultural values offer to promote the "Nigerian in us". Among other suggestions, this paper recommended that massive cultural education should be embarked upon by relevant agencies, like the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), the Centre for Black and African Arts and*

*Civilization (CBAAC) the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to take pride in the strength and plurality of Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Diversity, Peace Building, Conflict Resolutions, Peaceful Coexistence

## **Introduction**

Over the years, there has been growing concern about the decline of positive values in Nigeria. It is an incontrovertible fact that the advent of colonialism and cultural globalization has caused some disruption in the Nigerian cultural pathway and value system (Macaulay, 2003). Sharing in the above view, former president Nyerere of Tanzania said: “Of all the crimes of colonialism there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe that we have no indigenous culture of our own or that what we did was worthless or something of which we should be ashamed, instead of being a source of pride” (Akinpelu, 1983). Globalization can be seen as one of the major forces influencing global cultures. Hence, the need for enculturation and cultural preservation among African nations has become an important consideration in this age. Today, the world has not only become a global village, but a global neighbourhood. In the Nigerian situation, the need for inclusive growth and its overwhelming significance for sustainable national development and the overall well-being of the citizenry cannot be overemphasized. If sustainable peace through equal opportunities, justice, social integration and symbiotic life, as well as values and peaceful co-existence, are to be upheld for nation-building and growth, effectively harnessing our cultural diversity should be a fundamental answer. In a global context, peaceful co-existence is the key that unlocks the door to meaningful development of any nation. Hence, inclusive growth is a wholesome and indispensable factor towards enhance the standard of living of the general population. In this paper, the researcher unpacked some potentials of Nigeria’s cultural diversity against the backdrop of the threat of cultural globalization

## **Cultural Diversity**

Cultural diversity or pluralism is a term used to describe a situation when ethnic groups within a larger society maintain their distinct cultural identities, and their values and practices are only accepted by the wider culture provided they are consistent with the laws and values of the wider society (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2011). The UNESCO’s 33rd General Convention in Paris defined cultural diversity in October 2005 as “the manifold ways in which the cultures of groups and societies find expression. These expressions are passed on within and among groups and societies.” These expressions are used by human beings to identify themselves in their localities. These identities could be manifested in

food, dress, housing, language, occupation, cultural activities, goods, services, values and living. These diversities are nurtured and promoted by artists and other stakeholders in the creative industry. Some of these cultural expressions include; our different modes of dressing, linguistic differences, festivals, ceremonies, celebrations, shrines, artefacts (both antiquities and contemporary), monuments, architecture, food etc (Abara, 2011). The General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2001, affirmed in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity that “...cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature” (UNESCO, 2001).

### **Sustainable Development**

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development is a set of seventeen (17) goals and 169 targets. Spearheaded by the United Nations, through a deliberative process involving its 194 member states, as well as global civil society, the goals are contained in a resolution after a summit held between 25-27 September 2015 in New York, United States of America. Over the next fifteen years, these new goals that universally apply to all countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind (United Nations Organization) (Oludele & Adebusuyi, 2016). The aim is that by the year 2030, the world would have achieved sustainable development for humanity and well-safeguarded planet earth.

Contextually, sustainability is described as the ability of a thing, idea, principle or value to be sustained, supported, uphold or confirmed (Wikipedia, 2018). Hence, Al-Roubaie in Ajibade (2013), avers that sustainable development is a situation that requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life. He goes on to say that, sustainable development requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecologically possible and to which all can reasonably aspire. Sustainable development has also been defined as the development that meets the needs and aspirations of the current generations without compromising the ability to meet those of the future generation (Abudul-Rasheed) (Owolali, 2012). Similarly, the United Nations defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

### **Some Challenging Issues Emerging from Cultural Diversity and Implications for Peaceful Coexistence Sustainable and Development in Nigeria**

Ethno-politico-religious sentiments are widespread in Nigeria. These, at times, end up in the disruption of peace and order resulting in the loss of innocent lives and the destruction

of properties. There have been incidences of such cases in Kano, Bauchi, Jos, Maiduguri, Aba, Warri, etc. The incessant incidents of mayhem and violence in Jos, Maiduguri, Kaduna and other parts of Nigeria have been linked to the ethno-religious problem. However, religion has been employed to ginger national support to justify incidences leading to violence in Nigeria. It is in this respect that the archbishop of Abuja has condemned the violence in Jos, not as religious but as due to social, economic, tribal and cultural differences (The Nation, 2010). Most recently, the mayhem and violence caused by the controlled and unquestioned activities of the Fulani herdsmen, especially in Benue state could be attributed to ethnic-politico-religious differences in Nigeria.

Nigeria's ethnolinguistic diversity has very significant implications in almost every area of the economy. It implies a major investment in educational and media resources to reach a diverse population. Diverse ethnic groups, with varied cultural patterns, have very different levels of social capital and thus differing capacities to enter into the process of proper change. The relative wealth of the country and the large size of some ethnic groups has allowed them to express their ethnicity in remarkable and sometimes problematic ways that are not mirrored in other similar countries. The dominance of particular ethnic groups in certain sectors of the economy has significant implications for equity. The pattern of dominant and excluded minorities is embedded in the administrative and economic subsystems and has important implications for access to justice and equitable resource sharing. Ethnic conflict has been a perennial feature of the Nigerian scene since pre-colonial times, but access to modern media and sophisticated weapons has increased the intensity of such conflicts to a degree that threatens the present fragile and "nascent" democracy.

The increased quest for ethnic exclusivity in recent times in Nigeria has continued to polarize the country with the attendant adverse consequences on development. Adefolaju (2016) asserts that this enduring agitation is caused by the socio-economic imbalance in the country, while Chief Gbenga Daniel believes that Nigeria's heterogeneous status is problematic arising from the reality or perception that access to the commonwealth is unequal and far between (Guardian, Jan. 27, 2004) in (Egbule, 2020). Consequently, Nigerian leaders have exploited the situation to further their ethnically structured social, economic and political objectives at the expense of national development and peaceful coexistence among Nigerians. This is evident in the appearance of many centrifugal tendencies, which are threatening or working for the dismemberment of the country such as the current Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, the activities of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the East and the militants in the Niger Delta. The consequences of these acts of mutual intolerance, inter-ethnic clashes and extreme ethnic nationalism are located within the prism of the

country's level of socio-economic development. One hundred and five years since the amalgamation of the various ethnic nationalities and over fifty-eight years since independence, the country is still underdeveloped.

The avoidable and disastrous Nigerian civil war that claimed millions of lives was facilitated by ethnic chauvinism. For instance, the counter-coup of 1966, supported primarily by Northern military officers, facilitated the rise of Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon to Head of State. Tension rose between the North and South. Igbos in Northern cities suffered persecution and many fled to the Eastern Region. In May 1967, the Eastern Region declared independence as a state called the Republic of Biafra, under the leadership of Lt. Colonel Emeka Ojukwu. The Nigerian Civil War began as the official Nigerian government side (predominated by soldiers from the North and West) attacked Biafra (South-East) on 6 July 1967 at Garkem. The 30-month war, with a long siege of Biafra and its isolation from trade and supplies, ended in January 1970. Estimates of the number of dead in the former Eastern Region are between 1 and 3 million people, from warfare, disease, and starvation, during the 30-month civil war (Metz, 1991). The June 12, 1993 crisis in Nigeria was due to the selfish desires of a particular ethnic group to lord it over other groups, especially those who feel they are born to rule.

Contributing to this discourse, Adefolaju (2016) states that the space presently occupied by Nigeria had always been home to various ethnic nationalities ever before colonial creation and occupation of it as a "Nigerian" nation. Thus, Nigeria has always been a multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society embodying various larger and smaller groups, angling for access and control of her scarce and valuable resources. Ifeanacho and Nwagwu in Egbule (2021) observed that Nigeria's efforts at achieving national development and peaceful coexistence among Nigerians have remained largely unrealized. The entire social matrix in Nigeria is characterized by inter-community and intra-community; inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic; inter-religious and intra-religious strife. Some of these conflicts are as old as the history of Nigeria as a nation.

Amali and Jekayinfa (2013) state that efforts to build one indivisible nation from several ethnic nationalities have constituted problems as well. Some of the problems that emerged are sometimes not anticipated. Most of the problems have disintegrative elements and persist. Generally, culture is supposed to be a basic tool for development which is why education is sometimes defined as cultural transmission. However, the multi-cultural nature of Nigerian society, which emphasizes the cultures of female circumcision, betrothal, early marriage, inhuman treatment to widows as well as expensive burial and building houses for corpses are cultures that are retrogressive and can lead to underdevelopment.

In a multi-ethnic African society like Nigeria, national development and peaceful coexistence have remained a difficult process. In practical terms, members of each ethnic group strive to actualize the interests of their groups, which are often conflicting because of the group's desire to exert hegemony over one another. Continuous ethnocultural group struggles, weaken the centre and tend to strengthen the group with resources and strength to struggle (Bassey, 2015). For instance, the quest for power and domination among the various ethnic groups is a recurring issue in Nigeria's political scene. Of the many ethnic groups, three stand out and have been prominent in the quest to be at the centre stage of decision-making in the country. These are the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. The big puzzle: Can cultural diversity and ethnic pluralism be harnessed for sustainable development and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria? The simple answer is yes; as shown below.

### **The Contributions of Nigeria's Diverse Culture to Peaceful Coexistence and Sustainable Development**

Culture is a way of life that evolved by a given people over the years. It is a lifestyle that comes because of accumulated knowledge and experiences given the peculiar environment the people found themselves. It controls their ideas and philosophy of life. It manifests in behavioural patterns and the practical production of material objects with which people interact with their environment. Generally, Nigerians cherish their communal values such as the extended family system, respect for the elderly, eating with the right hand, disciplining erring children, rendering service to one another, not publicly showing anger, the principle of dignity of labour (hard work and handiwork), cultural festivals, respect for the marriage institution and so on.

Cultural diversity is a valuable resource for attaining development goals, including fighting poverty and promoting gender equality, quality education and human rights, and we must fully integrate it into the global strategies for sustainable development. In achieving the Millennium Development Goals, UNESCO is continuing to strengthen its advocacy and action in favour of the link between culture and sustainable development. Hence, Irina Bokova, former Director-General of UNESCO (2009-2017), stated that cultural diversity is a valuable resource for attaining development goals. She stated further that our cultural diversity is the common heritage of humanity. It is a source of renewal of ideas and societies, through which we open up to others and craft new ways of thinking. This diversity provides opportunities for peace and sustainable development.

As a tool for societal living, the knowledge of culture and its application help transform a person from a mere biological being to a social being. It gives order and meaning to the mode of social organization a people have evolved over a period. It promotes unity, love,

and loyalty among people of the same culture. People who share the same cultural traits such as common values or language, tend to be united by those traits or elements (Egbule, 2014). It regulates human behaviour and conduct. It provides roles that govern the members of a given society. For instance, Nigerian culture abhors and forbids people from marrying their blood relatives or having pre-marital sexual relationships.

Respecting and promoting cultural diversity facilitates intercultural dialogue, prevents conflicts and protects the rights of marginalized groups within and between nations, thus creating optimal conditions for achieving development goals. Promoting cultural activities and traditional knowledge and skills are very effective means to strengthen environmental sustainability and the social capital of communities. Culture contributes to the alleviation of poverty, control of diseases and improvement of the standards of living of the people. Cultural heritage, culture and creative industries, sustainable cultural tourism, and cultural infrastructure serve as strategic tools for revenue generation, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, giving her rich-cultural heritage and substantial labour force (Deekor & Maekae, 2015).

In addition, it creates job opportunities through creative arts and crafts works. Also, most people in Nigeria are farmers because farming as an occupation has been inherited from their forefathers. The United Nations Creative Economy Report 2013, co-published by UNESCO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), confirms that the creative economy is one of the most rapidly growing sectors in the world. From audio-visual design to production, performing arts to new media, and publishing to the visual arts, our cultural diversity is creative. It is a source of income, conveying identities and collective benchmarks, contributing to social cohesion and self-esteem in our globalized world.

Culture establishes ways of meeting our biological needs, subsequently, enhancing human capital development. For instance, marriage, reproduction, family life, the raising of one's children (child upbringing) and even social interaction are all within the confines of culture. Extended families are still the norm in Nigeria and are, in fact, the backbone of the social system. The family is expected to provide for the welfare of every member. It defines the identity and heritage of a people and does not allow them to be swallowed up by other cultures. In other words, it distinguishes people from their neighbours or other groups in Nigeria. Culture also enhances progressive human development, and creativity and increases productivity.

Culture is not a commodity like any other, and this principle, which is internationally recognized by the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, adopted in 2005, is a guiding principle for forging more

innovative and sustainable development strategies. Hence, culture can be used as a stabilizing agent and an effective tool for arresting the tide of poverty, unemployment and misery. It is an agent of communication. As man interacts with his neighbours in society, his culture informs his particular mode of communication or language. It is with this language he interacts and communicates ideas with, and to his fellow being. Man can equally communicate through music.

Cultural diversity is a stimulator of creativity. Investing in this creativity can transform societies. It is our responsibility to develop education and intercultural skills in young people to sustain the diversity of our world and to learn to live together in the diversity of our languages, cultures and religions, to bring about change. It emphasizes the dignity of labour and promotes social and moral values. It informs man on how to grow his crops for food, and how to enjoy his life through play, music or dance. To survive as he interacts with his environment, he builds a house to live in, a chair to sit on, a cutlass for farming, and a means of movement - all these forms the scope of culture.

Culture defines the specific roles of individuals both as members of a family and a given society – thereby averting undue conflict of interest and interference. For instance, the roles of fathers, mothers and children differ in the family. In addition, age grade (peers) performs specific duties (like maintaining the local roads, market square, etc) as stipulated by the people's culture (Egbule, 2019).

It promotes healthy competition and nation-building, through cultural festivals/days. Many nations use cultural heritage and cultural events and institutions to improve their image, stimulate urban development and attract visitors (tourists) as well as investment in their economies. The local economy stands to be boosted as many cultural artefacts would be on sale and many employment opportunities would be created for the people. Wase Rock, Kura falls, ancient Jos museum in Plateau state, Argungu fishing festival in Kebbi state, Obudu cattle ranch, Tinapa shopping complex, the ancient city of Benin in Edo state, Osun festival in Osogbo, Igbo new yam festivals, National War Museum displaying relics of the Nigerian Civil War and local inventions, Akwette: Blue River Tourist Village, The Long Juju Shrine of Arochukwu in Abia State, Yankari game reserve in Bauchi state, Eyo festival in Lagos are some of the tourist attractions in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

Generally, Nigerians see themselves first as members of one cultural or ethnic group or the other, and secondarily as Nigerians. The cultural divergences of the ethnic groups in Nigeria are manifest in all areas of their cultural life such as language, legends, occupation, oral literature, ways of marrying, thinking and solving problems, dances, the



type of food they eat and way of cooking and eating it. Cultural diversity can serve as a source of exchange, innovation and creativity. Inclusive growth and sustainable development are not achievable if no effort is made to recognize the role that cultural diversity plays in everyone's lives. For Nigeria to move away from its present chaotic and violent condition, coupled with the pandemic crisis, Nigerians and their leaders must arouse the spirit of oneness to foster collective action. Interestingly, strategies that would help in addressing the problems of pan Nigeria values are suggested.

### **Suggestions/Way Forward**

Given the aforementioned challenges posed by cultural diversities, as well as its usefulness, the paper recommends some workable strategies towards positive utilization of our diverse culture, aimed at achieving peaceful coexistence within diversity for a strong, united, virile and democratic society in Nigeria. Below is a twelve-point viable option:

Massive cultural education should be embarked upon by relevant agencies (e.g. National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) ), the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to take pride in the strength and plurality of Nigeria.

The people and government of Nigeria must rise to the challenges posed by the pluralism of the Nigeria Federation to accommodate groups (especially the minority) and guarantee access to power and equitable distribution of resources. The diversity in the nation should be used for strength and not for political polarization and ethnoreligious conflict.

This paper calls on all stakeholders in the culture industry (ministry) to take advantage of the unique opportunities of the mass media in their quest for the promotion of patriotism and Nigerian cultural heritage. In addition, the mass media should be highly responsible in their reportage, especially in their use of language. Responsible journalism should be the media practitioner's watch word. While the movie industries should project more of Nigerian culture, which has the potency of integration.

Nigeria needs bold, vibrant and articulate leadership to manage her diversities, promote national integration and development, as well as enhancing peaceful coexistence. It is pitiable and pathetic to note that Nigeria has been less fortunate in its leadership. Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have continued because Nigerian elites are corrupt and split along lines of religion and ethnic chauvinism. This has resulted in ethnic rivalry, suspicion, witch-hunting and hostility among leaders.

Government should organize public enlightenment campaigns through the National Orientation Agency (NOA), NYSC orientation camps, seminars and workshops on the ways of promoting tolerance, especially among non-students.

The media should be credible and free from any kind of influence from various pressure groups. They should keep a distance from any kind of political and commercial control to avoid the menace of the “paid news” phenomenon.

Finally, this paper is a clarion call on Member States of UNESCO and respective governments to ensure the development of new and viable institutions and mechanisms to champion the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

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*EGBULE, Philip Onyekachukwu; UKOR, Onyeka Destiny & OLORI, Oghogho*

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