REPOSITIONING THE MUSEUM IN NIGERIA FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Like many other socio-economic and political institutions in Nigeria, the origin of the museum is traceable to the colonial era. The colonialists were interested in the museum only as a place where Nigerian cultural artifacts are domiciled as tourist attraction. This paper strives to highlight the often neglected but important role of the museum as the repository of not only the material aspects of culture but also the non-material culture; the normative and ideational basis of human societies which prescribe and proscribe behavior as well as providing the raison d'etre of material culture. This paper contends that the museum in Nigeria should be repositioned to enhance her enormous potentials for initiating and fast tracking social change and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Key words: Colonial. Culture. Development. Museum . Nigeria

1.0   Introduction

Museums offer an insight into the intellectual, aesthetic, cultural and technological heritage of a people. The beauty of the museum lies in the fact that vast arrays of knowledge are encapsulated or ensconced within the convenience of indoor viewing. Apart from being a source of inspiration, such artifacts engender enlightenment, pride in the wealth of such possessions and richness of spirit which may inspire breakthrough in scientific discovery. This is in line with the view expressed by Light, Keller, and Calhoun, eds. (1989), that

> It is a statement of fact that scientific knowledge
> and the attendant technological breakthrough emerge
> from a particular social and historical context. Flights
> of inspiration notwithstanding, scientific discovery is a
> highly social achievement.

The Capitoline museums, the oldest public collection of art in the World first opened in 1471 when Pope Sixtus IV donated a group of important ancient sculptures to the people of Rome. In the same

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spirit, the Vatican museums, the second oldest museum in the World was founded in 1506 when Pope Julius 11 invited the public to enjoy his sculptural collection (http://corporatenigeria.com) In Nigeria, in addition to the museum established in Esie in 1945, the 1953 antiquities ordinance led to the establishment of museums in Ife (1954), Lagos (1957) Owo (1958) Benin and Oron (1960). After the Nigerian civil war, the Federal government created museums of National unity in Enugu and Ibadan to foster national unity (www.nigeriamuseums.org) Prior to this time, collections of cultural artifacts and historic memorabilia were held privately by monarchs, wealthy chiefs or heads of families .This practice was aimed at chronicling the rich cultural heritage and historic advancement of various families and ethnic nationalities, long before the colonial enterprise created the polity known today as Nigeria.

Like other socio-economic and political institutions in Nigeria, such as the school system, the prison service, the civil service and the police force, the Nigeria Museum is a colonial creation. It was conceived, established and midwifed as part of the colonial enterprise. It was the vision of the founding fathers of the Nigeria Museum that

> The day may come when people will voyage from all parts of the
> world to see the Museums and exhibition rooms of Lagos, Abeokuta,
> Ife and Benin City (Duckworth E.H, Cited in Afigbo & Okita 1985:7)

The vision thus confined the Museum in Nigeria to the role of tourist attraction. It relegated to the background, the most important role of the Museum as the repository of both material and non-material aspects of culture thus bridgeing the gap between the past, the present and the future. This is more so in an underdeveloped economy like Nigeria battling to salvage and project her image. This task of projecting Nigeria's image is more daunting in this era of globalization where improved technology allows the developed countries of the world to advertise and project their cultural practices, belief systems and values as the bench mark. On the contrary, poverty, unemployment, bad leadership and the fear of a bleak future have driven many Nigerians into exile in Europe and America (Anah 2006:50). It is therefore appropriate at this time to critically assess, and highlight the role of the Museum in social change and sustainable development in Nigeria.

2.0 The Museum in Nigeria
Three main factors have inhibited the actualization of the potentials of the Museum in Nigeria. These are
  (a)   The limitations of the colonial vision which established the Museum
  (b)   The long period of political instability and bureaucratic bottleneck in the civil service.
  (c)   The underdeveloped nature of the Nigerian economy.
However, before discussing these factors in detail it is pertinent that we define the core concepts in this treatise to avoid ambiguity, enhance elucidation and better understanding.

2.1 Development

The concept 'development' gives the impression of growth, prosperity, positive change and improvement. However these impressions are prone to subjective interpretations. For instance, it is not every growth that is developmental. Lagos is one of the fastest growing cities in the world but one of the least in the provision of such basic infrastructural facilities as water, electricity, sewage systems and refuse disposal. In a similar vein, the prosperity of a country, state or town, may be concentrated in a few hands leaving majority of the people impoverished. Also a high per capital income in a situation where income distribution is skewed in favour of a minority cannot be seen as developmental. As a result of several interpretations that the impressions of development evoke, it is not possible to have a universally acceptable definition of development. As the Independent Commission on International Development Issues (1980:48) put it.

> Development never will be and never can be defined to universal satisfaction. It refers broadly speaking to desirable social and economic progress and people will always have different views about what is desirable. But if there is no attention to the quality of growth and to social change one cannot speak of development.

Whether as praxis or theory the concept 'Development' is normative. As a result of this prescriptive attribute, it invariably draws the student of society into comparisons or value judgment. Thus a continent, country or town is assessed as being more or less developed than another. Also, as a result of this comparison, some countries of the World are classified as developed while others are referred to as either developing or underdeveloped. It is pertinent to point out here that the expression "developing countries or country" is misleading. First, it directs attention away from the fact and circumstances of the countries underdevelopment. Secondly, it gives the false impression that the 'developing countries' will eventually be like the 'developed' countries.

In this context, development is seen, not as a dynamic, multidimensional product of human endeavour but an unchanging methodology that mirrors Europe and American. As Bernstein (1979:79) put it, development is held to represent,

> the product of a historical process in the West, which is at the same time a historical promise for other parts of the world.

Ake (1982) attributes this to the Eurocentric teleologism in Western social science. He opines that at the time Western scholars focused their attention on the study of Africa and the Third World in general, new analytic tools were not used. Rather tools already in use but especially those favourable to the comparative study of Western societies were beamed on Africa and the Third World. Thus typologies of Western social science were used to characterize the evolution and development of Africa. Therefore,

> They presented the societies of the third world as being approximations of the typologies of the lower ends of the developmental continuum and offered the Western societies as

> approximations of the typologies of the higher and advanced stages of development continuum… More importantly, the methodology associated with this teleological perspective was such that the question of the development of Third World countries was tangentially reduced to the possibility of becoming like the West.(Ake 1987:43)

In the recent past, attention in development debate has shifted to sustainable development. It is defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987:43) 'as that development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

In essence sustainable development is a process of change in which

> The exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potentials to meet human needs and aspirations (Blackwell, Goodwille & Webb: 1992)

The socio-cultural perspective of sustainable development is of immense relevance to this essay. The stable transition or evolution of cultural and social systems, the equitable distribution of resources to check poverty as well as involving the rights of future generations in policy making are part of the socio-cultural view of sustainable development. This has a direct bearing on the role of the museum to initiate socio-cultural change and sustain development. The importance of this role has been trivialized in the past. Thus in Nigeria, despite four national development plans executed from 1962 till 1985, the orientation of technological development and institutional change have remained externalized and out of context with Nigeria's rich culture in technology, aesthetics and institutional development. Thus unemployment, profligate exploitation of resources, imperialistic relationship with the West and the debt burden have mortgaged the needs of the present generation while compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. If we take graduates of tertiary institutions as our example, we will discover that this scarce human resource is not effectively utilized in Nigeria. A colonial educational system long overdue for overhaul combine with unemployment and underemployment to make it impossible to regenerate the resources expended in the training of these graduates both at the individual and national levels. The United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Africa (2011: VIII) opines that

> declines in labour productivity, increasing youth unemployment and rising numbers of working poor are worrisome trends for the continent. Indeed, the recent political developments in North Africa and the Middle East are a wake – up call both for Africa and other global regions on the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach to growth .

In many cases, the graduates are forced into exile in Europe and America, where they are either dehumanized through menial labour or in the desperate quest for residence permit, join the United

states marines albeit at little or no regeneration value to Nigeria (Anah 2006:53). These are anomalies that can be rectified by a virile and dynamic museum system imbued with the task of restructuring socio-political and cultural institutions and reorientation of policy anchored on the values, belief systems, mores and norms of the people. This is in tandem with Uka's (1986) view that the socio-economic, political and even medical breakthrough that Africa requires to achieve an enviable level of development lies in the rediscovery of the   "roots of the original system of traditional education in Africa…with such re- discovery, Africa then will be in a strong position to build the new system on a solid foundation" (1986:130)

2.2 Social Change

Unlike development, the concept of social change has a universally acceptable definition. It refers to "change in the social structure and social relationship of the society" (Horton & Hunt 1980). Examples of social change include a change in the level of informality between individuals as can be observed when one moves from a typical rural area to an urban centre. Social change can be distinguished from cultural change which refers to changes in the culture of a society. Examples here include inventions in material culture or changes in non-material and ideational aspects of culture such as new forms of music, dance, art or the present trend towards empowerment of women as entrenched in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

However this distinction between social and cultural change is more often than not over looked as the terms are interchangeably used and their meaning overlap. As a result of this, the term socio-cultural change is used in this essay to represent both social and cultural change. Having defined the core concepts of sustainable development and social change, we now proceed by examining in details the main factors that have inhibited the potentials of the Museum in Nigeria to initiate socio-cultural change and sustainable development.

2.2.1 The **Limitations of The Colonial Vision Which Established The Museum.**

As stated earlier, the vision of the colonialists that established the Nigerian museum confined it to tourist attraction only. However, the material culture on display in the museum symbolize history, belief systems, achievements, values, ideas about human dignity, justice and equity that are prone to change and improvement through discoveries, diffusion, invention and crisis. To stagnate the museums in Nigeria at the level of tourist attraction is to deny them of their dynamism. In Paris, the Louvre museum is much more than a tourist centre. The items exhibited which may be interpreted albeit wrongly as ordinary sentimental objects capture historical epochs of significance in French history. Same is applicable to the museum of Modern Art in New York city, the Tate Modern in London and the National Museum Lagos. It is perhaps a well known fact that flag independence granted Nigeria by the British colonialists in 1960 did not translate into economic independence. Therefore little or no effort was made to overhaul, restructure or redefine the role of socio-economic and political institutions left behind by the colonialists. The Museum was not an exception. The colonialist view of the Museum as a tourist attraction remained and still remains a clog in the wheel of progress, stagnating not only the Museum but socio-cultural development in Nigeria.

The Nationalists that took over the reign of leadership from the colonialists were too busy transforming themselves into a comprador bourgeois class that they could not attend to the urgent need of transforming the Nigerian socio-cultural and political economy to serve the peculiar needs of Nigerians. This is ironic in view of the fact that these Nationalists rode on the back of cultural revival to mobilize the Nigerian people for independence. Central to this cultural revival is the concept of African personality. This embodies political and intellectual undertones. Broadly, the concept of African personality can be defined as the cultural expression of what is common to all peoples whose home is the continent of Africa and others of African origin who may be in diaspora. At the intellectual realm the concept of the African personality was to rekindle in people of Africa, the nostalgia of being associated with African cultural practices such as mode of dress distinct from European suits, African religious practices, food and music. As a political force, the concept of African personality embedded in cultural revival became a rallying point for political action. Cultural revival can still be used as a rallying point for reorientation and restructuring of the socio-cultural and political system. The museum remains the most appropriate agency to do this.

2.2.2 The Long Period of Political Instability and Bureaucratic Bottleneck in The Civil Service

The museum in Nigeria is ensconced within another creation of the colonial administration known as the civil service. According to Iheriohanma (2006:72) "The crop of men who held the administrative machinery in executing her majesty's and the colonial agencies order formed the pillar of what eventually became the Nigeria civil service". The low productivity in the Nigeria civil service has been blamed for status deflation, loss of integrity, career discontinuity and low morale of the civil servants and by extension the inability to sustain development in Nigeria. Yet it is the same service that superintends over the Museum. The professional and intellectual initiative that is required in museology is sacrificed to bureaucracy. Secondly, the long period of political instability in Nigeria witnessed the usurpation of political office by soldiers of questionable academic and administrative capability. At the time, there were no opposition parties to military rule, the dissenting voices were found among the intelligentsia. These were found in the Universities, research institutes, Polytechnics and the museum. Proposals for development, research and design funds within the ivory tower for instance were seen as input from real or imagined foe by the military. Without adequate funds to execute development projects, the museum was confined to the regional capitals of old and serving the parochial purpose of recreation. The military regime's aversion for the intelligentsia made it impossible for the museum to collaborate with the relevant departments of Sociology and Anthropology, History and Archaeology in Nigeria Universities in the reorientation and mass mobilization of Nigerians. Also political instability occasioned by rampant military coups ensured policy discontinuity at the detriment of the potentials of the museum for transformative change and sustainable development.

2.2.3 The Underdeveloped Nature of The Nigerian Economy

Underdevelopment is most often than not seen as the absence of development. This is an unfortunate misconception. Underdevelopment refers to the effects of the institutionalized unequal

relationship between the developed countries of Europe and America and the Third world countries. This relationship has ensured the carting away, dissipation and disorientation of human and natural resources to the extent that instead of improving the living conditions of the people, development efforts seem to create confusion, disarticulate the economy and compound existing problems. This is referred to as the development crisis in Africa (Anah 2007:112). In Nigeria, underdevelopment has translated into abject poverty of majority Nigerians and socio-economic dependence on the developed countries of the World. The external orientation of the economy, political and socio-cultural institutions has made it impossible to initiate revolutionary change that is comparable to pre-independence era cultural revival. The thrust of development policies have been dictated by such Western institutions as multinational corporations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation. This has given room for massive cultural and economic imperialism. The debt burden which is a direct consequence of economic imperialism has ensured the dearth of investment capital even in such crucial areas as education. For instance the debt management office in Nigeria revealed that the one billion dollars paid to the Paris club of creditors between 2004 and 2005 represent 70 percent of the total (recurrent and capital) education budget (Anah 2007:113).

This reduction in investment capital has had a negative impact on the museum in Nigeria. First it has made expansion too slow while reducing man power development. Also noble initiatives in research, publications and public enlightenment are stultified. Perhaps the greatest blow that poverty and lack of funds has dealt the museum in Nigeria is that it has turned the museum into the recreational preserve of the bourgeois class. The masses are engaged in a daily struggle for survival that a visit to the museum comes last in their list of priorities. It is unfortunate that both students and lecturers who know the importance of the museum are part of these poverty stricken masses.

3.0 The Role of the Museum in Social Change and Sustainable Development

Afigbo & Okita (1985) have suggested five main ways that the museum can contribute to nation building. These are summarized as

a. Cultural education of both young and old people within the society.
b. Promoting mutual understand among the various ethnic groups in the country.
c. Contribution to stability by reorienting Nigerians away from naked materialism and petro-naira to subtler values of human society.
d. Reactivation of rural handicraft and animation of rural area
e. Economic progress through money earned from tourism.

It is the view of this essay that the museum in Nigeria needs to rise beyond nation building, to sustain development. This can be achieved by initiating socio-cultural change. To put the museum on a sound footing to carry out this arduous task we suggest a radical overhaul and reorientation of the museum itself. The museum should be removed from the supervision of the ministry and turned into a centre of historical, archeological and anthropological excellence. This way, the museum will be effective in regulating, superintending and complementing the efforts of

Universities, Polytechnics and other relevant institutions and disciplines. This will encourage manpower development within the museum and the harnessing of local knowledge about social, political, agricultural and economic organization of the people gained over the years. This change in the structure of the museum will encourage home grown ideas, self reliant development and improve performance. This idea is in line with the meaning of the word 'museum' as the "home or resort of the muses; a place of study; a resort of the learned" (Kirkpatrick ed. 1983:834)

Secondly, in recognition of the high level of cultural imperialism which has led to the loss of interest in Nigerian cultural practices among young and old Nigerians, the museum should initiate a framework for a pedagogy of the oppressed that will champion and express core Nigerian values and morals such as the dignity of labour, the love of one's neighbor as epitomized by extended family relations in Africa and the need for justice and equity. As a result of the persistence of the effect of colonialism, neocolonial mentality has made Nigerians believe in the conscious and concerted effort made by the colonialist to denigrate African values, cultural practices and historical achievements. In this vein, colonial historians have denied the great achievements of Africans in arts, technology, religion and even political organization. This denial is one of the ways of undermining the African, his cultural values and technological breakthrough in order to justify such historical facts as the slave trade, colonialism, imperialism and present day globalization that have transferred the human and material resources of Africa for the development of Europe and America. The museum should chronicle past and present achievements of Nigerians in all fields of endeavour and circulate these for local and international consumption to counter Western propaganda and blackmail. This will ensure that such achievements do not serve the interests of this generation alone but also take care of generations to come.

Thirdly, recourse to cultural revival at a level higher than what obtained in the post second world war era in Africa is suggested. This will have the desired effect of reawakening both old and young Nigerians to their cultural roots and alerting them to the reality and insidious danger of cultural imperialism.

Last but not the least, the museum should direct policy initiatives in line with positive cultural values by cataloguing and highlighting African discoveries, inventions and enhancing the diffusion of these values in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions as part of the school curriculum. This can be achieved through the ethnological approach to local resource management. The ethnological approach to local resource management takes into cognizance the role of culture as a determinant of not only how to use a particular resource but what actually constitutes a resource in a given society. Thus it is only when a resource has a high value within the cultural setting of a society that such a resource is sought after.

Local resource management is a field of study interested in the changing interrelations between state and society. It is also a promising field for social scientists interested in the processes of diffusion and integration of innovations into the socio-economic system. Emphasis is also placed on the relevance of local knowledge which has been tested and passed on from one generation to another (Breemer,Drijver & Venema eds 1995).

Cultural practices, traditions and belief systems therefore play an important role in local resource management. Because the ownership of land, a major resource in both agriculture and industrial

development is hinged on mostly traditional ownership, the importance of the ethnological approach in Nigeria cannot be over stated. It considers areas of conflict and agreement between the laws and policies of the government of the day and the cultural practices of the people. In this way knowledge gained through long term traditional practices become useful input in policy making. The museum which enjoys the monopoly of collection, preservation, documentation, study and display of cultural artifacts in Nigeria should have a good idea of the local resource base of the country. Also the museum is the custodian of the traditional practices, values, technology of Nigerians and should direct policy towards their most effective use, to achieve sustainable development.

4.0 Conclusion

This essay represents a critical appraisal of the Nigeria museum as an agent of social change and sustainable development. A combination of the limitations of the vision of her founding fathers and the underdeveloped nature of the Nigeria economy are held culprit for the failure of the museum to realize her full potentials in engendering and aiding diffusion of the values, aesthetics, technological breakthroughs and other historic achievements of Nigerians in the past.

This study has suggested a complete overhaul of the museum in Nigeria which includes her removal from the stultifying civil service environment and transformation into centre of excellence in history, archeology and anthropology. It is also suggested that the museum employ the ethnological approach in local resource management in order to put her on the path of sustainable development.

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