WHEN CULTURE FALLS BEHIND: UNDERSTANDING NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS

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Abstract

This paper explores the complex interplay between cultural practices and developmental progress in Nigeria, a nation characterized by diverse ethnic groups and rich cultural heritages. It investigates how certain traditional beliefs, social norms, and practices can act as barriers to economic growth, infrastructural development, and social modernization. The study contextualizes Nigeria's developmental delays within historical, political, and socio-economic frameworks, highlighting the role of cultural resistance to change, governance challenges, and educational disparities. Through qualitative and quantitative analyses, the research identifies specific cultural factors that impede progress, such as gender roles, religious influences, and local customs that conflict with modern developmental policies. The paper argues that understanding and addressing these cultural nuances are essential for formulating effective development strategies aimed at sustainable growth. It advocates for culturally sensitive approaches that integrate traditional values with developmental goals, fostering social cohesion and national advancement. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of a balanced perspective that respects Nigeria's cultural diversity while promoting reforms conducive to overall progress.

key words: culture, development, economic growth, traditional values, modernization

Introduction

Nigeria, often celebrated for its rich cultural diversity, vibrant traditions, and dynamic population, faces significant developmental challenges that impede its progress on many fronts. While cultural heritage plays a vital role in shaping national identity and social cohesion, it can sometimes become a barrier to modernization and economic growth when traditional practices, beliefs, or social norms resist change. This tension between culture and development is particularly visible in Nigeria, a country striving to overcome issues such as inadequate infrastructure, educational deficiencies, political instability, and health crises. Understanding Nigeria's developmental delays requires a nuanced exploration of how cultural factors influence governance, economic policies, educational systems, and social attitudes. For instance, deeply ingrained customs or resistance to Western-style reforms can slow the adoption of innovative solutions crucial for national advancement. Moreover, cultural perceptions towards gender roles, technology, and modern healthcare often impact efforts to promote inclusive development.

This study sheds light on the complex interplay between culture and development in Nigeria, emphasizing both the challenges and opportunities inherent in bridging these gaps. By examining

specific cultural practices and their implications for development strategies, we can better understand how Nigeria can harness its cultural wealth to foster sustainable progress, rather than allowing cultural conservatism to hinder its potential. Nigeria, always dubbed the "Giant of Africa," is renowned for its cultural diversity, with over 250 ethnic groups, numerous languages, and a rich tapestry of traditions and customs. This cultural vibrancy has historically been a source of national pride and social cohesion. However, despite its vast natural resources and youthful population—over half of its citizens are under 30—Nigeria faces persistent developmental delays that hinder its economic progress and social stability. At the core of Nigeria's developmental challenges lies a complex relationship between culture and modernization. While cultural practices and traditional beliefs are foundational to community identity, they can sometimes act as impediments to progressive change. For example, certain customs related to gender roles may limit women's participation in education and the workforce, thereby constraining economic growth. Similarly, resistance to Western-style education, modern healthcare, and technological adoption can slow national development efforts.

Furthermore, specific cultural norms surrounding governance, justice systems, and social hierarchy influence policy-making and the implementation of reforms. In some cases, entrenched customs and the patronage networks they foster create resistance to transparency and anti-corruption measures, thereby weakening state institutions. Religious and cultural influences also play a significant role in shaping public attitudes towards issues such as family planning, reproductive health, and education, which are critical for sustainable development. Economic disparities across regions are often amplified by cultural differences, with some communities.

Development crisis has become a reoccurring issue in Nigeria coupled with the series of contradiction inherent in every epoch of Nigerian society; the country has passed through different stages ranging from primitive to slave society, colonialism, decolonization and neocolonialism. Presently, the crisis of development is the most serious problem facing Nigeria. This is because the continent remained largely underdeveloped despite the huge mineral and human resources, several decades after the end of colonialism, most parts of Africa is still fighting with the problems such as basic infrastructure facilities, insecurity of live and property (Alumona 2009:1). For example, Nigeria is the most populous African country and the country reflects most of activities in Africa.

Nigeria earned around US$500 billion in Oil revenue since the 1970, yet remains mired in poverty, unemployment, bourgeoning domestic debt, and infrastructural squalor, abysmal health and educational services and attendant social frustration and unrest (Suberu; 2007:21) Nigeria reflects most parts of Africa in that it inherited arbitrary state boundaries from its colonial age and was under military authoritarianism for most part of its existence as a nation, said of Nigeria that "it earned around US$500 billion in oil revenues since the 1970s, yet remains mired in poverty" (Alumona, 2009:2). Barely, some years after independence, hope and expectations were high on the new emerging state that has been under the stranglehold of colonialism for many decades given its huge resource endowment-human and material resources In buttressing the above analysis,

Omotola (2001) asserts that of these are not heady days for Nigeria, heralded at independence in 1960 as a missing giant at both regional and global levels, given its huge resource endowment-human and material, the country has not only failed to actualize its potentials, but also appears to have effectively squandered its opportunities for greatness, ignominiously seated at the very nadir of development. The quest for stability and development is, without doubt, the Holy Grail for many third world countries, a never ending, tedious, yet elusive, search for that condition under which these countries would be able to Distribution of national wealth, political stability and accountability.

Nigeria, often celebrated for its rich cultural diversity and vibrant traditions, faces significant developmental challenges that hinder its progress across various sectors such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic growth. Despite its abundant natural resources and youthful population, the country continues to grapple with developmental delays that impede its potential for sustainable growth and prosperity. A critical factor contributing to these delays is the complex interplay between cultural practices, beliefs, and societal norms that often conflict with modern development initiatives. Traditional practices, religious doctrines, and cultural resistance can impede policy implementation, hinder adoption of technological innovations, and affect attitudes towards education, gender equality, and health practices. For example, certain cultural norms may discourage female education, hinder women's participation in economic activities, or perpetuate practices detrimental to public health, such as early marriages and resistance to vaccination.

Furthermore, cultural conservatism can sometimes oppose governmental efforts to reform or upgrade infrastructure and social systems, leading to resistance or apathy among the populace. This disconnects between cultural values and developmental goals creates a significant obstacle for policymakers and development agencies striving to foster positive change. Additionally, the influence of cultural allegiances and regional identities may contribute to political instability, uneven resource distribution, and governance challenges, which further slowdown national development. These issues are compounded by limited awareness and understanding of how to integrate cultural considerations into development.

This paper investigates the complex interplay between cultural practices and developmental progress in Nigeria. It aims at finding out how certain traditional beliefs, social norms, and practices can act as barriers to economic growth, infrastructural development, and social modernization. It also finds out the specific cultural factors that hinder economic growth, technological advancement, education, and health initiatives. Recognizing these barriers is a critical first step towards designing interventions that are culturally sensitive and more likely to succeed. As this study emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural awareness into policy-making and development programs, policymakers and development practitioners will understand the cultural contexts within which to operate thereby crafting strategies that engender the needed development.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Modernization theory. Modernization theory explains how societies transit from traditional to modern societies through a series of stages: Traditional Society referring to the period of agricultural or horticultural societies with limited technology and economic growth; Pre-conditions for Take-off, which represents when societies began to adopt modern practices and technologies; Take-off covering the period of acceleration in industrialization and economic growth; Maturation characterizing increased technology use and production; and finally, Mass production and mass consumption, a period societies become industrialized and modern.

Modernization theory emerged in the 1950s, influenced by American social scientists and the Cold War. It draws on economics, sociology, and political science to understand social change and development. Theorists like Walt Rostow and Talcott Parsons contributed significantly to its development. Despite criticisms, Modernization theory remains influential in development studies, shaping policies and initiatives aimed at promoting economic growth and social progress. Its emphasis on economic growth, social change, and technological advancement continues to inform research and analysis.

Wallerstein (1974), in his work *The Modern World-System*, challenged the linear and ethnocentric view of Modernization Theory by emphasizing the global capitalist system. He argues that development is shaped by international economic structures, highlighting core-periphery relations that perpetuate inequality. Amin's (1974) *Centre-Periphery Model* critiqued the one-sided view of development, emphasizing how peripheral countries remain dependent on core countries. He advocated for a more autonomous and self-reliant development approach, criticizing Western-centric models.

Through the lens of Modernization theory, scholar have made lots of contributions to knowledge. Lipset (1959) has argued that rising economic development leads to crucial social changes that, in turn, foster democracy and more rational political systems. Rostow (1960) proposed a model that would make societies move through distinct phases, culminating in a "take-off" into self-sustained growth and high mass consumption, focusing on economic and technological change as key drivers of modernization. Through his work on *The Achieving Society*, McClelland (1967) highlights the psychological dimension of modernization, posits that a society must cultivate psychological traits like a high need for achievement, innovation, and entrepreneurship to modernize successfully. Inkeles and Smith (1974) detailed the characteristics of a "modern" personality, which he described as independent, rational, open to new experiences, active in public life, and capable of long-term planning. Finally, Smelser (1959) emphasises the transition from traditional to modern societal structures, such as the shift from simple to complex technology and from subsistence to commercial agriculture.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is renowned for its rich cultural diversity and historical heritage. However, despite its potential, Nigeria faces significant developmental delays across various sectors, including education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic growth. Scholars

increasingly examine how cultural factors influence these developmental challenges. Modernisation theory is considered useful in understanding Nigeria's developmental delays through the lens of cultural dynamics.

Literature Review

Numerous studies highlight that cultural practices, beliefs, and social norms can act as both facilitators and barriers to development. Ojo (2017) emphasizes that traditional beliefs often influence attitudes towards modern education and healthcare, sometimes hindering progress. For example, certain cultural practices may discourage the utilization of formal medical services, impacting health outcomes. Folarin (2019) discusses the influence of traditional rulers and local community norms in Nigeria. While these institutions preserve cultural identity, they can sometimes oppose reforms necessary for development, such as gender equality or infrastructural modernization. Resistance rooted in cultural loyalty can slow policy implementation and social change.

Gender disparities rooted in cultural perceptions significantly impact Nigeria's developmental trajectory. Oduro et al. (2020) highlight that gender biases and restrictions limit female participation in education and economic activities, thereby impeding national development. Such norms perpetuate inequality and reduce the collective human capital essential for growth. Religion is another critical cultural element influencing development. Adejumobi (2018) notes that religious beliefs sometimes clash with scientific and modern developmental practices. In some communities, religious doctrines influence attitudes toward health interventions, family planning, and education, affecting development outcomes.

Balancing cultural preservation with modernization remains a challenge. Ogbodo (2021) argues that Nigeria's efforts to adopt modern technology and policies often face backlash from conservative groups fearing the erosion of cultural identity. This tension can delay infrastructural and technological advancement. In another study, submits that educational frameworks deeply rooted in cultural contexts influence development. He advocates for culturally responsive education that integrates local values while promoting modern skills, noting that failure to do so may result in educational mismatches, affecting productivity and innovation.

These past studies relate to the present study in the sense they all discuss issue of culture and development. However, they differ; the past studies do not identify the cultural practices that can hinder development as well as the ones that promote development, which is the focus of the current study. The current study identifies the deeply rooted cultural beliefs and practices that can act as barriers to development, hinders advancements in health, education, and economic growth.

Methodology

This study adopts ex-post facto research design, which is ideal for conducting social research when it is not possible or acceptable to manipulate the characteristics of human participants. The ex-post

facto research design creates a situation that generates the requisite data for analysis because of its more inclination to data gathering than variable manipulation (Asika, 2006). The hypothesis tested by the study are: 1) Traditional cultural beliefs and practices in Nigeria hinder the adoption of modern technological advancements, thereby contributing to developmental delays; 2) Societal norms and gender roles within Nigerian culture limit access to education and economic opportunities for women, which hampers overall national development; 3) Resistance to change rooted in cultural values and customs impedes policy reforms and infrastructural development in Nigeria, leading to persistent developmental delays.

The study adopt documentary method of data collection in which case data were obtained from the secondary sources, such as journal articles, periodicals and conference papers. Precisely, the data were obtained from (Ofo, 1999) and Asika (2006). The secondary source of data was considered okay since the events being investigated have already taken place and piece of information required have already been documented. Qualitative descriptive method was used for data analysis by subjecting the variables to simple descriptive qualitative analysis from which inference was drawn making the results meaningful for empirical verification of the hypotheses.

Development Indicators

In Table 1 are key development indicator.

Table 1 Key Development Indicators

INDICATORS	2010	2015	2020	2025 (Projected)
GDP Growth Rate (%)	6.4	2.7	1.9	2.5
GDP Per Capital (USD)	1,200	1,500	2,000	2,300
Human Development Index (HDI)	0.532	0.534	0.532	0.550
Literacy Rate (%)	59.0	62.0	65.0	67.0
Infant Mortality Rate (per, 1000)	74	65	62	60

Source: World Bank Databank- https://data Bank.worldbank.org

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis focuses on Nigeria's developmental progress and cultural factors. It looks at the economic growth, human development, and cultural and social factors.

Economic Growth

1) GDP Growth Rate: The GDP growth rate declined from 6.4% in 2010 to 1.9% in 2020, indicating economic slowdown. The projected rebound to 2.5% in 2025 suggests modest recovery.
2) GDP per Capita: Growth from $1,200 in 2010 to $2,000 in 2020, with a projected increase to $2,300 in 2025, reflecting gradual economic improvement, but still lagging behind many developing nations.

3) Implication: Economic stagnation limits resource availability for health, education, and infrastructure, reinforcing developmental delays.

Human Development

1) HDI: There is slight increase from 0.532 in 2010 to 0.532 in 2020 (stable), with a projected rise to 0.550. Nigeria remains classified as a medium human development country, indicating ongoing social and economic challenges.
2) Literacy Rate: There is an incremental improvement from 59% to 65%, with projections to reach 67%. Education challenges, rooted in cultural attitudes and resource constraints, contribute to this slow progress.
3) Implication: Education is crucial for development; cultural beliefs that undervalue formal education for certain groups (e.g., girls) hinder progress.
4) Health Indicators: Infant Mortality Rate: Slight decline from 74 per 1,000 live births in 2010 to 62 in 2020, with a projected decrease to 60 by 2025. Although improving, the rate remains relatively high, highlighting ongoing health system challenges.
5) Implication: Persistent health issues, coupled with cultural practices and limited healthcare infrastructure, affect child survival rates.

Cultural and Social Factors

1) Traditional Beliefs and Practices: Deep-rooted cultural beliefs significantly influence health behaviours, education, and gender roles. For example, some communities may prioritize traditional medicine over formal healthcare, impacting infant mortality and health outcomes.
2) Gender Roles: Conservative gender norms may restrict girls' access to education and healthcare, affecting literacy and HDI scores. Empowering women through cultural shifts could enhance social development.
3) Religious Influences: Religions like Islam and Christianity influence social norms, including attitudes toward education, health, and gender equality. These influence policy implementation and community acceptance of development initiatives.
4) Community Engagement: Local leaders and elders often shape community attitudes, making them vital partners in promoting development programs grounded in cultural understanding.

Conclusion

The study highlighted the crucial role culture plays in Nigeria's development challenges. Nigeria's cultural heritage is eroding due to Westernization and modernization, leading to developmental crises and alienation. This cultural erosion has contributed significantly to the country's underdevelopment. Leadership crisis has also plagued Nigeria, with poor leadership and institutional betrayal breeding corruption and nepotism (This is supported by Uwaezuoke, 2021). This has led to widespread resentment and further exacerbated the country's development

challenges. Moreover, decades of structural disadvantage have created a feedback loop of impaired development, affecting cognitive capacity and emotional resilience.

The importance of cultural values cannot be overstated. A strong value system is essential for national development, and Nigeria's crumbling value system has led to decadence and corruption. The country's developmental challenges are further compounded by poverty and unemployment, with over 71 million Nigerians living below the international poverty line and youth unemployment exceeding 40%. Inadequate infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, and healthcare, also hinders economic growth and development. To address these challenges, Nigeria needs to prioritize cultural reorientation, focusing on core cultural values and traditional Nigerian values to stem youth criminality and promote national development. This can be achieved through cultural revitalization, promoting indigenous languages, arts, and traditions.

Leadership reform is also crucial, with a need to prioritize transparency, accountability, and merit-based decision-making. Investing in human capital, particularly education, healthcare, and skills development, can enhance cognitive capacity and emotional resilience. By addressing these challenges and promoting cultural revitalization, Nigeria can unlock its development potential and create a more prosperous future. Ultimately, understanding Nigeria's developmental delays requires a nuanced consideration of cultural, economic, and historical factors. By acknowledging the Intricate nature between these factors, Nigeria can develop effective strategies to promote national development and improve the well-being of its citizens. Nigeria's developmental delays cannot be fully understood without considering the complex interplay of cultural factors. While cultural heritage is vital for social cohesion, certain traditional practices and norms may impede modernization efforts. Promoting culturally sensitive development strategies that respect local traditions while encouraging progressive change is crucial for Nigeria's developmental future.

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