

# **CULTURE, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT**

**By**  
**The Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies,**  
**Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.**

**Consultant,**  
**Dr. R.O. Soetan,**  
**E-mail: [rsoetan@oauife.edu.ng](mailto:rsoetan@oauife.edu.ng)**

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## Executive Summary

**This study aims to analyse the critical role of cultural concepts, traditions and practices in Africa's development.** Other specific objectives include a review of diverse definitions of culture and development concepts as they intertwine to form a framework for assessing the increasing awareness of the need to mainstream cultural approaches to development strategies in Africa. Another important objective is to reveal the centrality of cultural approach to development in the on-going international call for an inclusive gender and development strategy to enhance sustainability. Using desk research, the study explored this relationship from the historical, current and future perspectives.

The new emphasis on cultural approach to development can be traced to the World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT) held in Mexico City in 1982 and the subsequent declaration of the United Nations Decade of Culture.

### **1.The Historical Perspective**

In elucidating the relationship between culture, gender and development from the historical perspective, the study sought to reach into the past to identify historical factors that may impinge on current developmental outcomes. From an historical vantage point, the study examined how cultural assets promoted wealth creation and social equity using the historical experience of the Yoruba of South West Nigeria as typical of an African society in the precolonial period.

Drawing from maxims, songs, folklores and proverbs, the study maintained that capitalist traits which encouraged the pursuit of individuality, industry and thrift were integral parts of the culture of the Yoruba. Social stratification based on indices of wealth (such as commerce, cultivation of large acreages of farms, large numbers of wives, children and slaves, potfuls of cowrie shells, wrappers, horses and scabbards) distinguished the wealthy and relatively wealthy as well as the not -actually wealthy -but comfortable individuals from the majority who were the have-nots. However, society accommodated everyone and no-one was left to their own fate given existing opportunities for upward social mobility. The Yoruba capitalism did not tolerate any form of slackness on the part of the industrious and wealthy personages who must of necessity be vigilant at all times otherwise they fell into bad times. This position was/is encapsulated in many axioms.

Most, if not all of these wealthy personages derived their wealth from hard work and diligence in peasant cultivation of food and cash crops and trading. Trading was a major cultural asset for creating wealth among the Yoruba. As stated earlier, women predominated in trading and commercial activities and constituted a vast majority of marketers at any given time and place. Notable women among the wealthy included Efunsetan Aniwura of Egba origin, who was a big-time farmer and producer of food crops in Ibadan. At a stage in her rise to wealth and fame, she was said to have had as many as 2,000 slaves on her farms.

Another cultural asset useful for the promotion of wealth creation was the traditional thrift/money lending. Most of the wealthy acquired sizeable parts of their wealth from this money lending enterprise. The poor existed in every society and constituted the vast majority of the population of each Yoruba community. They lacked most of the privileges of the political, social and economic elite; often lacked the leadership and managerial skills of members of the elite. However, the aspects of the culture that helped to promote social equity in this Yoruba capitalism was the possibility/opportunities of upward mobility open to these poor; for, except the lazy, idlers, physically and mentally handicapped the poor could, by dint of hard work and diligence rise above their rank and enter the rank of the elite.

## **2. The Current Perspective**

In examining the current perspective, the study explored the major issues and main debates on culture, gender and development. Culture is seen in the African social context as transcending the arts or artefacts. folklore. literature. music. dance and other artistic paraphernalia.. Culture is versatile and all- embracing of both material and non-material objects and concepts. It entails the totality of a people's norms, ethos, values, beliefs, *raison d'etre*, codes of socially acceptable conducts, modes of life, religion, philosophy and ideology. It also includes communal informal education and technology. Culture therefore structures 'and determines the way social institutions shape life as well as cultivated and imposed behaviour communally transmitted from one generation to another. Because development involves changing such cultural attitudes and institutions, cultural approach is one of the determinants of the success or failure of development strategies in many parts of Africa.

The study analysed the theoretical perspective on gender and development and scrutinised the main phases of the development debate for their perception of women's role in development. Conscious efforts at mainstreaming women into the development process started during the Second Development Decade, given its emphasis on issues of equity and redistribution as well as the meeting of the basic needs of people. This period coincided with the publication of Ester Boserup's pathbreaking work on Women's Role in Economic Development in 1970 giving an impetus to the Women in Development (WID) lobby. A major impetus for WID had resulted from the 1975 Mexico City UN women's conference and the resulting 1976-85 UN Decade for Women. While women's role in economic development did not occur in a vacuum, yet WID failed to account for the existing power structures codified in the sexual division of labour.

During the Second Development Decade, the second UN women's conference was held in Copenhagen in 1980 and in reviewing progress made since the first women's conference, the delegates noted deterioration in women's conditions in most countries since the first UN Decade for Women. However with increasing economic deterioration as well as worsening poverty, in many sub-Saharan African countries, the Human Development approach which revolved around investment in people and human-centred development was proposed by both the World Bank and UNDP as the development paradigm for alleviating poverty in the 1990s. The World Bank Human Development strategy has been criticised for making all but a cursory reference and adopting an instrumentalist approach to women.

A major criticism of the concepts of development is that they originate from western conception of economic and social realities. For all their seeming commitment to social equity, both the human development strategy and the GAD approach have taken the Western economic project of development as 'given'. Hence they often evade the prevailing inequalities between the North and South.

In its analysis of the intersection of gender, culture and development, the study considered population policies in development countries as illustrative of the instrumentalist approach of development to women that was often devoid of the cultural context. The 1984 World Bank Report adopted the redistributionist argument that rising population encouraged a culture of high fertility since persistent poverty is associated with a traditional practice of high fertility behaviour.

It is not surprising that given that the aim of redistribution is to influence patterns of fertility among the poor by countering traditional practices, it has met with little success. A major argument of westernisation was rooted in the view that the elimination of traditional values and practices would lead to progress in Third World countries.

The growing concern of Third World scholars and activists about cultural imposition masquerading as 'development' has led to increasing attention by such scholars to retheorising issues such as race, colonialism and global inequalities and their effects on women (Parpart 2000).

The feminist political economy framework has criticised western feminist construction of the life experiences of Third World women as being too limited and dominated by western biases and assumptions. Consequently it fails to present an accurate picture of the experiences of Third World women especially on the issue of gender power relations in precolonial societies. The feminist political economy perspective regards women as having a greater autonomy and control over their lives in precapitalist societies. Examples were cited of women who occupied traditional positions of power in Africa in precolonial societies.

However, while acknowledging the potentials of the feminist political economy approach for re-theorising the position of women in precolonial societies more accurately, it is also important to realise that not all local traditions are beneficiary to women. Hence there is the need to challenge cultural traditions and practices that encourage and subordinate women while valorising and encouraging those which promote gender equity.

Negative and harmful traditional practices such as Female genital Mutilation (FGM), male child preference, early marriages, wife battering and other forms of domestic violence against women, and derogatory and harmful widowhood practices indicate the cultural subordination of women.

### **3. The Future Perspective**

In reviewing the future perspective, women's grassroots organisations were identified as critical for women's empowerment given their long history and recognised cultural role in Africa.

The following lessons were gleaned the interconnection between culture, gender and development:

- Traditional concepts need to be reflected in development discourse- homegrown models that make use of historical and cultural experiences are critical for the sustainability of development efforts in Africa.
- The imposition of Western values through the development agenda questions and challenges the world view of Third World people while promoting and valorising Western values in the process. This is perceived as reinforcing cultural domination and promoting social dislocation resulting in unsustainable development.
- The vast reservoir of traditional and indigenous knowledge that have sustained societies for hundreds of years should be tapped for income and employment generation in the face of increasing poverty and unemployment in sub Saharan Africa.
- There is the need for a more inclusive re-theorising and reconstruction of development that accounts for the voices of African scholars, activists, grassroots women and other vulnerable groups.
- Negative traditional practices, beliefs and laws that are harmful to women and derogatory of their status will need to be changed.

The study recommended future strategies for mainstreaming culture and gender in development including country based programmes, sectoral strategies, institutional strategies. These comprise of advocacy and sensitisation workshops, direct support programmes and bottom-up grassroots participatory programmes.

## **CULTURE, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **Abstract**

This study examines the relationship between culture, gender and development from an African perspective. Using desk research, the study explored this relationship from the historical, current and future perspectives. It elucidated the historical experience of the Yoruba of South West Nigeria as typical of African societies in general. It also explored how cultural assets, defined as cultural values, beliefs and practices promoted wealth creation and social equity. In examining the current perspective, the study challenged Western conceptions of development propagated through various UN development decades and its prescriptions for gender equity as being devoid of the cultural context of African societies and hence incapable of promoting sustainable development. For all their seeming commitment to social equity, both the human development strategy and the gender and development approach originated from western conceptions of economic and social realities. In addition, they have evaded prevailing inequalities between the North and the South fostered by neo-liberal economic policies which are at the root of poverty and its feminisation in the South. However, African culture cannot be romanticised as there are certain aspects of it which marginalise, inhibit and subordinate women. As long as the goals of development is sustained improvements in people's welfare, such practices would need to be changed. The study recommended future strategies for mainstreaming culture and gender in development including country based programmes, sectoral strategies, institutional strategies. These comprise of advocacy and sensitisation workshops, direct support programmes and bottom-up grassroots participatory programmes.

# CULTURE, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

## 1. Introduction

The main objective of this study is to present cultural concepts, traditions and practices as important determinants of development in Africa. It is also aimed at enunciating how cultural knowledge and traditional practices structure and shape gender relations. Other specific objectives include a review of diverse definitions of culture and development concepts as they intertwine to form a framework for assessing the increasing awareness of the need to mainstream cultural approaches to development strategies in Africa. Another important objective is to reveal the centrality of cultural approach to development in the on-going international call for an inclusive gender and development strategy to enhance sustainability.

The new emphasis on cultural approach to development can be traced to the World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT) held in Mexico City in 1982 and the subsequent declaration of the United Nations Decade of Culture. This global awareness has contributed to the global reawakening to the centrality of culture to any meaningful progress in the development process. This moved the importance of culture from the limited arena of cultural artefacts, arts, music and traditions to the empirical sphere. That meeting recognised the fact that socio-cultural dynamics can enhance or retard the progress in human development. This recognition is largely instrumental to the declaration of the decade of culture from 1988 to 1997.

The Mexico conference made a concerted attempt to define culture in relation to development. Consequently, gender and development studies are reviewed there to relocate the centrality of culture as a vital canon of intervention. Researchers and policy makers have underscored the importance of cultural knowledge as it augments our understanding of development issues and policy to enhance sustainability. It is becoming increasingly apparent that women's developmental challenges are directly correlated to cultural knowledge, attitudes, and apprehension. Women's issues can not be approached *in vacuo* and understanding women's developmental needs is centred on a thorough deconstruction of the way culture either encourages, inhibits, limits or frustrates the efforts to empower women. The specificity of women's needs can be linked to the variation in historical, geographical as well as socio-cultural milieu.

This study argues that the interrogation of the current approaches to gender equality and sustainable development from a cultural perspective is critical to achieving balanced development. It is imperative that cultural factors be integrated into current discourses and strategies for enhancing gender equality and sustainable development if the resulting outcomes are to be relevant to the realities of African societies and facilitate sustainable improvements in the quality of life and wellbeing of the people. The study examines the foregoing from three perspectives, the historical, current and future.

## 2. The Historical Perspective

### **The Usefulness of Past and Existing Cultural Assets in Promoting Wealth Creation and Social Equity: The Value of Capitalist Traits among the Yoruba**

The history of many African and Nigerian societies in general and of the Yoruba in particular contain ample evidence of capitalism. The simple/ traditional egalitarianism flaunted is a smokescreen for, beneath the veneer of the so-called communalism lay the pursuit of individuality, industry and thrift. Many studies, for instance by Africanus Horton (1969:147) and Ekundare (1975:22) have shown unmistakable proofs of this capitalist trait. As a matter of fact the gist of it has been rendered in innumerable maxims and folk-songs. Ajisafe (1948:13) has preserved one of such maxims:

When day breaks  
Every tradesman betakes to his calling  
The spinner takes up the spindle  
The weaver bends over his shuttle  
The farmer takes up his implements  
The hunter picks up his weapons  
The fisherman wends his way to the waterside.

This same maxim has been composed in a lyric poem by Suberu Oni of Why Worry Orchestra, Ondo as:

B' oju ba ti mo o  
Olowo m' owo  
Oranwu m'akeke o  
Ajiwese b' odo omi lo.

Capitalist traits are integral aspects of the culture of the Yoruba, its tenets have governed the traditional ethics. The Yoruba say:

Ise o gb' ekun  
Ebi j'are ole  
(Weeping is no remedy/cure for poverty  
Hunger is the reward/outcome of idleness.)

Eniti ko le se bi elede l'ona Oyo/Ijebu etc  
Ko le se b' Adegboro l'oja oba.

(He who cannot labour and sweat like pigs on the road to Ijebu/Oyo.  
Cannot hope to acquire wealth and flaunt it as Adegboro does about town)

The Yoruba is particularly contemptuous of lazy persons. A lyric verse composed in the early 1960s by Adeolu Akinsanya of the Western Toppers' Band, Lagos, is as follows:

Eni b' ole ko r'omo bi  
Ole f'aso iya bo'ra sun  
Ole l'apa ko fi s'ise  
Iya t o n j'ole ko kere.

(The Mother of the lazy-bone has got no child  
The laggard covers himself with shame  
The lazy has hands he does not work with them  
The sufferings of the lazy are immense)

And the musician admonished further:

Iya t o b'ole ko r'omo bi  
Ko r' omo bi o wa aye lasan  
Ole sun o tun f'aso iya bora sun  
Mase s'ole asiko nlo.

(The mother of the lazy has got no child  
She's got no offspring, she lives in vain  
The lazy person sleeps and covers himself with shame.  
Don't be lazy, time rolls by)

The corollary of all the above was/is that the Yoruba extolled the merits of labour, industry and thrift among the citizenry from youth. Many of the innumerable folktales were didactic in nature and content, these demonstrated the benefits of industry, diligence and determination. A sample of such didactic tales is 'Omo elepo d'eyin', its gist as recorded by Ellis (1974:244-247) depicted a little girl hawking palm oil, she unknowingly sold her good to a goblin who short-changed her. The little seller made persistent pleas and demands for full payment for her sale and followed the buyer about until she reached the goblin's abode. She was rewarded with great riches. Imitators received bags/parcels full of worthless items!

Thus, a culture/ people with the capitalist traits such as depicted above possessed ways and means of promoting wealth creation as well as social equity. The Yoruba society was stratified, on the basis/criterion of value, (money making and possession or non-possession of economic assets etc) as haves and have-nots. On the top of the social and economic ladder were the wealthy, Oloro/Olowo, successful men and women in their economic pursuits such as peasant cultivation of food and cash crops, crafts and commerce. Such wealth was generally invested in the acquisition of status symbols; a large number of wives, big compounds, where possible a large number of children, numerous hangers-on and domestic slaves, potfuls or numerous rows of cowrie shells, a number of huge Ikerin wrappers generally thrown over the shoulder, huge vests, in a few cases, horses and stables, scabbards ( the Yoruba equivalent of a coat of arms (Olomola, 1984: 234). These are visible evidences of opulence.

Each Yoruba had its wealthy and relatively wealthy citizens, as well as not-actually wealthy but comfortable individuals, borokini. The traditional rulers were generally considered among the haves because their persons and offices were maintained from public treasury and/or dues, tributes gifts and other feudal services. Citizens who could boast of possessing a substantial amount of money, for instance six pence, egbewa were highly regarded. The vast majority of the population were have-nots, these consisted of masses of freeborn, the poor, mekunnu, talaka as well as the lazy, idlers, the sick and the handicapped. The Yoruba society accommodated everyone and no man/woman except the incorrigible was left to his/her own fate.

The Yoruba capitalism did not tolerate any form of slackness on the part of the industrious and wealthy personages who must of necessity be vigilant at all times otherwise they fell into bad times. This position was/is encapsulated in many axioms such as:

Oju oloju ko jo t'eni  
(Another person's eyes are not like one's own eyes),

K' Olorun ma t'oju ole m'alagbara  
B'alagbara se faari, gele a gbe e  
(Pray that God does not humiliate the rich and powerful in the presence of the poor and lazy.  
For if the powerful slackens, he is doomed.)

A large number of wealthy personages had existed in Yorubaland. Johnson (1969:126) mentioned a few: Amoloku of Oro, Gedegbe of Ofa, Lapemo of Ijomu near Oro, Omobiyo of Guguru, Minimi of Eruku, an unnamed personage in Gbudu, another unnamed man in Ijebu. Johnson was not specific as such, he even mentioned an unnamed wealthy woman at Ijana, who died intestate and whose wealth was the cause of intensive bickering about 1858 between Alaafin Adelu and Aare Kurunmi (Johnson, 1969:331). Johnson also mentioned Madam Efunsetan Aniwura, Iyalode Ibadan and Madam Tinubu, first Iyalode Egba. Oguntuyi (1952:80) mentioned a woman, named Aye, nicknamed in Ado folklore as Eleo eti Ureje, the wealthy one who lived around the banks of Ureje river, Traditions say that she was so fabulously rich, that when she died her relations abandoned her corpse and concerned themselves with her property. Local traditions in Akure mention another very rich woman, called Mojere. There were very numerous rich, wealthy and powerful men and women in Yoruba history.

Most, if not all of these wealthy personages derived their wealth from hard work and diligence in peasant cultivation of food and cash crops and trading. Traditional economic activities among the Yoruba were largely divided on the basis of sex such that, in cultivation, men did the cutting, heap making, hoeing, planting and weeding and at their spare times foraged for game/bush meat. Women participated in planting and often had their own farms. Otherwise they were active in the last stages of cultivation; harvesting and processing of farm products. Women predominated in the gathering and collection of forest and farm products such as pepper, mushrooms, fruits especially kolanuts (indigenous, acuminata and new, nitida). They also predominated in local and long distance trade. They kept chickens, ducks, pigeons, pigs, sheep, goats, cats etc, usually for sale and rituals. They also predominated in esusu schemes. All these economic activities, when extensive, brought wealth, respect, fame and social and economic power to the individual.

Trading was a major cultural asset for creating wealth among the Yoruba. As stated earlier, women predominated in trading and commercial activities and constituted a vast majority of marketers at any given time and place. It seems certain that the need to ensure the safety of these marketers who were mostly women partly necessitated the location/establishment of principal markets in front of and/or adjacent to the Oba's palaces and quarter markets, in front or adjacent to the chiefs' courtyards (Ojo, 1971: 32,34; Krapf-Askari, 1966; 45-51). When a Yoruba Oba was dead, the principal market was normally shifted from the traditional site elsewhere nearby where a chief or the Oba

designate could oversee market activities. Moreover, the sovereign rulers Oba, and baales/olojas had the prerogative of establishing markets and of provision of necessary security along the routes leading into and away from such markets and thus egress from markets. The traditional authorities also provided market law enforcement officers who ensured that peaceful atmosphere pervaded market scenes (Olomola, 1984:225). For all these, the authorities derived immense revenue from the markets while the markets were thronged with marketers, buyers and sellers, idle loafers, men and women domicile outside their homelands. Many marketers apart from buying and selling exchanged information, struck bargains, entered into contractual arrangements, engaged in recreational activities.

Thus, the oloro and borokini were individuals who applied themselves diligently to production of farm and cash crops and trade. It seemed certain they made extensive use of hired and slave labour, the former made up of freeborn and dependent relatives, iwofa servicemen/women, boys and girls who served their masters in lieu of interest while the principals remained outstanding (Johnson, 1969:127) and the latter all made up of domestic slaves purchased for the purpose. Successful farmers had/kept several hundreds of these on the farms. Successful traders employed large numbers of domestic slaves in their trade parties/caravans to and from nodal markets and other major centres of commerce such as Old Oyo, Old Owu, Benin etc, in the distant past, and Badagry, Osogbo, Oru, Akure etc, in the nineteenth century and Ejinrin, Osogbo, Agbabu etc. in the 1890s and 1900s.

A couple of examples will suffice for this exercise. Efunsetan Aniwura of Egba origin, was a big-time farmer and producer of food crops in Ibadan. At a stage in her rise to wealth and fame, she was said to have had as many as 2,000 slaves on her farms (Johnson, 1969: 393). She probably went into food processing and trading (commercial) activities. She was conferred with the title of Iyalode of Ibadan and in the early 1870s ranked among the social, economic and political elite in the city. Similarly, Madam Tinubu, an Owu-Egba, made her fortune in Abeokuta, Badagry and Lagos in the 1850s and early 1860s and was conferred with title of Iyalode of Egba in 1864. These two wealthy women invested very heavily in business enterprises, attained to prosperity, high chieftainship and political power. The men, counterparts of these wealthy women had similar experiences in the period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century slave wars, a large number of war-chiefs especially in Ibadan and to some extent, Egba, Ijesa and Ekiti became wealthy and lived aristocratic lives on account of large numbers of domestic slaves they possessed from a couple of decades of their involvement in slave wars. Large numbers of domestic slaves were stationed in these war-chiefs' cottages, toiling and bumping and contributing to the sustenance of their masters' families until the British arrest of these erstwhile warlords and disbandment of their former War-boys. Thus, in the hey-days of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, slaves were cultural assets and were means of promotion of wealth creation (Awe 1992:99-102).

Another cultural asset useful for the promotion of wealth creation was the traditional thrift/money lending. Most oloro and borokini acquired sizeable parts of their wealth from this money lending enterprise. The Yoruba, usually sought (and obtained) loans for marriages, funerals especially of parents and parents-in-law (Johnson, 1969: 130; Ellis, 1974:161) and chieftaincy installation ceremonies. Where the loans were very substantial, the creditor was an oloro but when the loan was not, the creditor was a

borokini. The sponsor onigbowo of the debtor served as witness of the contract between the lender (creditor) and the borrower (debtor). The Yoruba still seek and obtain loans (from thrift societies, individual money lenders and banks etc) and for the age-old purposes, but modern trends have brought house-warming, celebration of good fortunes which include child naming, birthdays, promotion, acquisition of cars and electronic gadgets! All these old-time and modern/contemporary events represent occasions the Yoruba hold extravagant parties which inadvertently keep many hands including creative and performing artistes in profitable/gainful employment.

The poor existed in every society and constituted the vast majority of the population of each Yoruba community. They lacked most of the privileges of the political, social and economic elite; often lacked the leadership and managerial skills of members of the elite. Generally the poor are very distinguishable in their low estate and life style. Of course many of them had identical life styles of the borokini, the vast majority of them had a wife while some even had no wives, and could not individually afford a wife and therefore could not raise families of their own. These were called, apon, their earthly possessions being only a goat/sheep as the case might be. The poor lived in the lineage compound or some dwellings of their own throughout their lives.

However, the aspects of the culture that helped to promote social equity in this Yoruba capitalism was the possibility/opportunities of upward mobility open to these poor; for, except the lazy, idlers, physically and mentally handicapped the poor could, by dint of hard work and diligence rise above their rank and enter the rank of the elite, become a borokini and even an oloro. Fortune could smile on the poor. Stories that illustrate this development were usually built around some poor but trustworthy/dependable servants who struck fortune while working on their masters' estates and were thus catapulted to the enviable class of the elite. In that way, ragged poor alakisa or elewe who picked leaves for a living had become an alaso, well-attired and respectable citizen. In a few cases such stories/allegories had happy endings when slaves and/or servants became traditional rulers of some mythical societies. Such situations are rendered in many maxims, for instance:

A ko mo 'bi ori mba ese re  
(We are incapable of knowing whither the head would follow the legs).

It is also the subject matter of a composition of lyric verses in the early 1960s by Adeolu Akinsanya.

Mo ti ri ri o  
Mo r'omoba to d'eru ri  
Mo r; iwofa to d'oloro  
Igba kan ko lo 'le aye gbo o  
Eda o l' aropin.....

(I have seen (heard about) it before  
I have seen a prince who became a slave  
I have seen a servant who became wealthy  
Nothing, not even time is permanent  
Human beings cannot be written off as doomed)

Pragmatically, elements of the poor masses were apprenticed to master craftsmen to learn some trade such as blacksmithing, wood carving or some craftswomen to learn some vocations such as weaving, retail trade etc, these often became proficient. This self development often led to upward mobility of the individuals concerned, they became members of their professional guilds and . thus entered the rank of the elite. That was the vogue for many centuries. This self improvement has become more apparent in modern times with the emergence of new opportunities created by British colonial economic system, the cultivation of new cash crops such as cocoa and cola nitida, gbanja, the monetization of the economy, introduction and availability of the wage- labour e t c. New vocations and trades became the vogue and men and boys were apprenticed to master carpenters, mansion /bricklayers, vehicular drivers, retail traders in building materials, household goods and other imported merchandise while women/girls were apprenticed to learn weaving, retail trade in local and imported cloths, merchandise such as trinkets and enamel goods, food processing etc. Formal education has provided complementary opportunities of upward mobility especially for individuals for entry into white-collar jobs, trades, business and industries.

In summary, it is pertinent to note that an ordinary meaning of the word, asset, applicable in this exercise is valuable or useful quality or skill. Cultural asset therefore refers to cultural values, beliefs and practices and their usefulness in promoting wealth creation and social equity! The Yoruba capitalism, the traditional society, its trade, industry and the place/role of the controllers of capital, the oloro and borokini especially the former has been highlighted and discussed against the background of how the indigenous capitalist traits dovetail with elements of contemporary assets, the usefulness of the former and latter in the promotion of economically healthier society and the various opportunities available to the poor in society for upward social mobility. It is worth noting that the hopes of advancement were (and are still) generally kept alive especially by the poor. As a matter of fact, they had more opportunities of upward mobility than the wealthy whose aspirations for elevation were limited by a number of cultural factors. Everything, the Yoruba believed (many still believe) depended on destiny. Destiny or predestination, a controversial notion which many individuals regard as fatalism and others regard as opportunity and chance, the Yoruba held (some still hold) and rightly interpreted by Ogunremi (1996:35-36) as endowment, empowerment 'created God's unique or personalized gift.....facilitating the accomplishment of difficult tasks'. The Yoruba say:

Ibi ori da `ni' si, l'a a gbe  
(We live and flourish where our head has destined us.)

The beliefs and practices discussed in this paper are integral aspects of Yoruba cultural heritage, many, if not most of the tendencies still exist not only among the Yoruba, but also in most parts of Africa.

### 3. The Current Perspective

#### Major Issues and Current Debates: Cultural Concepts, Beliefs, Practices and their Impact on Development

Culture is both evolutionary and revolutionary. Culture goes through an internal evolutionary process involving growth, greater heterogeneity and coherence. It also goes through a process of change and adaptation as a result of contact with other cultures, the influence of a dominant culture and the influence of the mass-media or communication technologies (such as the Internet) etc. As a result, culture must be seen as a dynamic mechanism that must adjust and adapt to external and internal conditions of existence.

Culture humanises development to re-establish its validity in a changing world and its impact on every domain of human knowledge and practice. Cultural discourse has therefore been central to contemporary humanities research and the location of culture and the question of talking back have continued to be a central methodology at the turn of the last millennium. Like other Third World critics, Homi Bhabha has centred the metaphor of the 'location of culture' as an important approach in modern scholarship. Some critics interrogate development when it does not take on board cultural imperatives. A self-conscious attempt to re-locate culture becomes a necessity. Without cultural contextualisation, some critics, including Bhabha, raise fundamental questions such as whose development and what are the motivating factors in development strategies?

Rejecting the theories of cultural purity and cultural universalism, he adopts cultural difference as a valid macro-cultural theory, "Cultural diversity is an epistemological object -culture as an object of empirical knowledge -whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as 'knowledgeable', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. ..." (Bhabha, 199 ). Many other critics have identified the inseparability of culture and identity. This also informs the theoretical frameworks of many Blacks as we see in Molefi Kete Asante's theory of Afrocentricity. Ali Mazrui, in his own cultural theory underscores the fact that power is culture and culture is power. He emphasises the idea that ideology and technology are rooted in culture in his functional theory of culture and development.

The attempt to define culture is elusive as Burama Sagna suggests. Nevertheless there are certain paradigms that constitute the sum total of culture and underlie cultural images and identity construction. It is the close affinity between cultural image and human identity that makes the definition of culture complex. The most flexible and yet comprehensive definition of culture is that arrived at during the MONDIACULT in Mexico city which has continued to be the most operationalised definition of culture:

*Culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material and intellectual features that characterise a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters but, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.<sup>1</sup>*

Burama Sagnia also raises a very salient question: "If we accept the postulate that culture is an adaptive mechanism that constantly adjusts to satisfy human, biological and social needs, shouldn't we then ask ourselves whether the best way forward for Africa is to marginalize the role of culture in development frameworks and process or to use it as a platform or springboard for development."<sup>2</sup> He sees culture as a tool for "a broad-based, qualitative and human-centred development." Cultural definitions are as diverse as its roles but one can aver that culture can be used to liberate or oppress, to augment or retard human growth and development. This also means that people may entrench the negative or positive images of culture according to their motives and purpose. Culture is not static and the failure to identify the necessity of cultural growth and how it impacts human experience and development can create conflicts in the lives of individuals or groups. It is this recognition that underscores the statement by Ato Wolde Michael Chemu that "all nations, nationalities and peoples have the right to build their culture in any way they believe beneficial".<sup>3</sup>

Culture is seen in the African social context as transcending the arts or artefacts. folklore. literature. music. dance and other artistic paraphernalia.. Culture is versatile and all-embracing of both material and non-material objects and concepts. It entails the totality of a people's norms, ethos, values, beliefs, *raison d'etre*, codes of socially acceptable conducts, modes of life, religion, philosophy and ideology. It also includes communal informal education and technology. Culture therefore structures 'and determines the way social institutions shape life as well as cultivated and imposed behaviour communally transmitted from one generation to another. Because development involves changing such cultural attitudes and institutions, cultural approach is one of the determinants of the success or failure of development strategies in many parts of Africa. Since culture shapes the socialisation process, it can enhance or retard developmental agenda. From this pedestal, I will focus this discourse on African perspective in constructing their cultural images and its impact on development. The arts including music, fine art, sculpture, oral literature and written literature are very important sites for identifying cultural factors that shape attitude to development. It is equally important to unpack development theory to evaluate the close interdependence with cultural concepts and attitudes.

Culture reflects sets of symbols which characterise and define societies or religions (UNESCO, 1983). Cultural knowledge, skills, talents and creative expressions are depositories of knowledge which are transmitted over centuries and reflect a society's mode of production and world view. While Western scientific rationality has been the widely accepted as the acclaimed world view, cultural diversity shows that there are different viewpoints and ways of interacting with the world as there are cultures (Young 1993). Cultural can be transformed and transmitted as shown by the development of industrial societies in Europe subsequently transmitted throughout the world (Melling and Barry 1992).

Industrialisation has changed the way in which all cultural expression are produced and transmitted; this negates the notion of cultural fixity and supports the view of cultural dynamism and transmission. Whatever form developmentalism has taken, its common feature has been an association of the adoption of western cultural values with progress. Traditional cultures and practices are displaced to make room for

westernisation. Hence such an approach has produced outcomes that are culturally incompatible with local situations and conflict with cultural identities thereby leading to a failure of the 'development project' as reflected by the worsening conditions of life for masses of people in developing countries.

The failure of development interventions has resulted in little or no improvements in the material conditions of life of people while at the same time displacing the cultural practices and traditional techniques more suited to people's ways of life. This has robbed to them of traditional knowledge and technologies that have generated income and sustenance for generations. The decline in the traditional textile industry and the construction industry in Nigeria which could have evolved and be transformed by technical progress thereby resulting in greater entrepreneurial and technical learning as well as greater access to regional and international markets are few examples of the effects of development in truncating cultural industries.

Development was about opening up the South for exploiting raw materials for Northern industries and as markets for manufactured products from the North. This unequal trade and power relations have persisted through each of the 'Development Decades' and continue to be manifested in the current globalisation era where both redistributionist human development approaches coexist with inegalitarian North-South trade relations which are designed to favour accumulation in the North.

Indeed, development often views culture as a bottleneck. This implies an assumed but erroneous cultural neutrality of western development paradigm. Current globalisation policies seeking greater integration of the South is similar to initial attempts at capitalist integration of developing countries. Although as the economies of Southeast Asian tigers are often touted as benefitting from neoliberal trade policies, yet the recent crises experienced by the NICs point to the dangers of neoliberal market policies and emphasise the imperative of retheorising development in the context of the cultural and social realities of developing countries.

#### (i) Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Development

Much of the development thinking on economic progress in the 1950s and 1960s were summarised by the grand modernisation vision of Rostow's stages of economic growth. In assuming that all nations will pass through stages similar to those already experienced by the advanced industrial nations, Rostow's economic stage theory is synonymous with the sociological theory of modernisation. This grand vision of a transition from subsistency to mass consumption and market economies has evaporated being punctured by the deteriorating conditions of living and worsening poverty of the masses of poor people in developing countries. A major blame for the failure of the grand development project has been ascribed to the imposition of western culture and social construction of knowledge as well as the exclusion of gender from western construction of rational economic behaviour.

Development theories are global but they target Third World, in an attempt by the international community to speed up and encourage development of these nations. The earliest development theory is modernisation theory. It upheld modernisation as the solution to Africa's 'underdevelopment' and the underdevelopment of the third world. The early phase of African literature corroborated this development theory by the way thematic preoccupations focused on the conflict between tradition and modernity at the individual and communal level. Early African writers thematised the problem of inevitable social change brought about by the colonial encounter and how it impacted individuals and communities. The protagonists embody the way these new definitions and conceptualisations of development have had visible consequences on the individual's psyche and the communal ethos. The dog became deaf and indifferent to the hunter's whistle in the 'things fall apart' syndrome. Literature celebrated resistance to social change in the tragedy of the Okonkwo which was seen as the tragedy of cultural alienation, dislocation and disintegration.

So far, four stages have been identified in the development debate (Young 1993, Bradotti et al. 1994, Harcourt 1994 and Parpart et al 2000). The initial goal of the UN development decades were rapid economic growth, followed by basic needs incorporating redistribution and growth and in the 1980s structural adjustment. The 1990s have been marked an emphasis on Human Development with a simultaneous emphasis on the neo-liberal globalisation project. The first Development Decade had rapid industrialisation as its goal and witnessed the initiation of large scale projects aimed at stimulating faster economic growth. Noting the failure of development to 'trickle down' to large masses people at the grassroots, the Second UN Development Decade of the 1970s went beyond investment in capital goods to development of human resources with an emphasis on improvement of health, education and other social services.

As a result, growth policies were accompanied by redistribution policies. However a fallout of the recession in the world economy arising from the oil crisis of 1973 for developing countries was the resulting debt crisis and worsening terms of trade. The neo-liberal prescription of structural adjustment policies by the IMF and the World Bank was a direct outcome of the debt crisis, global stagnation and worldwide recession (Bradotti et al. 1994). With its emphasis on economic restructuring through cuts in government expenditure on social services, SAP sought to roll back the state by reducing its role while encouraging greater visibility for the private sector.

Women were not visible in the First Development Decade. No explicit role was envisaged for them. The dominant paradigm of the family was that of the corporate unit of the male-headed household. Hence, benefits were directed at the male household head with the belief that such benefits would automatically 'trickle down' to other household members. Consequently development projects targeted men and only regarded women as tangential, viewing them mainly as wives and mothers and not as producers. The underlying development rationale was that of the household division of labour with men as producers (sometimes assisted by the women) while women functioned mainly as housewives and mothers. Expectedly, development planners focused on increasing the productivity of men in agricultural (mainly cash crop) production (Kabeer, 1994).

A more people-centred approach was adopted in the Second Development Decade given its emphasis on issues of equity and redistribution as well as the meeting of the basic needs of people. This period coincided with the publication of Ester Boserup's pathbreaking work on *Women's Role in Economic Development* in 1970 giving an impetus to the Women in Development (WID) lobby. She highlighted women's productive roles in agricultural production, the informal sector and other areas apart from the reproductive sphere. Her contributions on women's role in subsistence agriculture particularly challenged the prevailing assumptions of development planners. Her observation that development had compounded the work burdens of women and that as a result women were marginalised from the development process resulted in prescriptions for integrating women into the development process.

The lack of data on women's socio-economic status and their contributions to market and non-market production were identified as constraint to integrating women into development (Young 1993). In addition, the increasing incidence of female-headed households challenged the previous construction of the male headed household. WID projects introduced income generation, small-scale projects for women. These have been criticised as being merely tokenistic given the low amounts of aid devoted to such projects. A major impetus for WID had resulted from the 1975 Mexico city UN women's conference and the resulting 1976-85 UN Decade for women. While women's role in economic development did not occur in a vacuum, yet WID failed to account for the existing power structures codified in the sexual division of labour.

Consequently in spite of greater attention to the institutionalisation of women's issues through women's bureaux, very little improvements occurred in women's socio-economic status. It is not surprising then that the terms on which WID sought to integrate women into development have been criticised (Berneria and Sen, 1981; Staudt, 1985; and Kabeer, 1991). Kabeer summarised the limited outcome of WID interventions succinctly as follows:

*"In other words, over a decade of WID policy has achieved a great deal in terms of 'symbolic politics' but rather less in terms of concrete achievements" (1994:9).*

The decade of the 1980s has been characterised as Africa's lost decade given the declining terms of trade, worsening debt crises and poverty witnessed in most subSaharn African countries. Structural Adjustment Policies had been criticised for being devoid of a human face and for exacerbating the plight of women and other vulnerable groups (Cornia et al. 1987; Elson 1990; and Commonwealth Secretariat 1989). Severe cutbacks in government expenditures on social services increased the work loads of women as the costs of adjustment were shifted from the public to the household sector.

As a result, women bore a disproportionate share of adjustment efforts. Cornia et al. (1987) proposed an "adjustment with a human face" in order to mitigate the debilitating effects of structural adjustment policies on women, children and other vulnerable groups. While UNECA proposed an African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Policies that would rely on a bottom-up approach to development, most other agencies did not question the usefulness of SAPs and its efficacy for development in developing countries.

During the Second Development Decade, the second UN women's conference was held in Copenhagen in 1980 and in reviewing progress made since the first women's conference, the delegates noted deterioration in women's conditions in most countries since the first UN Decade for Women. In spite of many areas of dissension revealing widely differing North-south ideological views, especially on the issue of female circumcision, by the end of the conference, over 70 countries had signed the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW set out the legally binding modalities and measures to protect women's rights and achieve gender equality.

Forward Looking Strategies (FLS) emerged from the 1985 Nairobi conference to assess the progress of the targets set at the women's Decade. The main strategy for advancing the FLS was to ensure women's education at all levels. The Nairobi conference further emphasised the role of women's machinery in facilitating women's contributions to development. However with increasing economic deterioration as well as worsening poverty, in many sub-Saharan African countries, the Human Development approach which revolved around investment in people and human-centred development was proposed by both the World Bank and UNDP as the development paradigm for alleviating poverty in the 1990s. The World Bank Human Development strategy has been criticised for making all but a cursory reference and adopting an instrumentalist approach to women.

With the exception of its focus on the environment it was also viewed as basically similar to the Basic Needs strategy of the Second Development Decade. A more scathing criticism is that it regarded human development only as a means to an end, the end being economic growth (Bradotti et al, 1994). Although the UNDP Human Development strategy has been lauded for being more people – centred than the World Bank's version, yet both were launched in the neoliberal economic climate of globalisation and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) round of talks. With the emergence of new regional trade blocks, globalisation has given rise to new arrangements of economic power which hold no promise for human development in the South.

A major criticism of the concepts of development is that they originate from western conception of economic and social realities. For all their seeming commitment to social equity, both the human development strategy and the GAD approach have taken the Western economic project of development as 'given'. Hence they often evade the prevailing inequalities between the North and South. This is more glaring in recent attempts at engendering reproductive health which hitherto had adopted a family planning approach to population control. While targeting women, the previous family planning approach emphasised birth control methods in the South, the reproductive health agenda arising from the 1995 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) proposed a more inclusive approach which targeted population control efforts not only at women but also at men. However, fundamentally unsustainable global economic policies which aim at favouring the economies of the North are at the root of Southern poverty and underdevelopment (Bradotti et al 1994 Furedi 1997).

## **(ii) The Intersection of Gender, Culture and Development**

Nowhere else is the relationship between culture, development and gender more visible as in the case of population policy in developing countries. As mentioned earlier, the crisis in development thinking in the 1970s precipitated the redistribution and sustainable development agenda by even growth-oriented institution like the World Bank. However in reality, economic inequality rather than underdevelopment was responsible for high levels of population growth. Hence while reductions in fertility would be concentrated in a small section of the society, for the greater majority of the economically marginalised, a tendency to high rates of fertility would be displayed.

The 1984 World Bank Report adopted the redistributionist argument that rising population encouraged a culture of high fertility since persistent poverty is associated with a traditional practice of high fertility behaviour. A similar stance of associating poverty with a culture of high fertility was adopted by the Brutland Report. However, poverty was “abstracted from its social context and treated as an unfortunate consequence of maldistribution” (Furedi 1997:119). It is not surprising that given that the aim of redistribution is to influence patterns of fertility among the poor by countering traditional practices, it has met with little success. A major argument of westernisation was rooted in the view that the elimination of traditional values and practices would lead to progress in Third World countries. This view coincided with the redistribution argument.

Economic development was the context of modernisation theory – this coincided of changing attitudes to family size. Population policy consisted of displacing traditional practices which encouraged high fertility and other constraints to family nucleation. Consequently they challenged traditions which were opposed to individualistic behaviour and also encouraged women’s labour force participation. However, population activists justify their agenda with the argument of changing the attitudes, norms and traditions of people by making them more compatible with those favouring lower fertility rates. However, in reality real income distribution hardly ever occurred. This suggests that discussions of poverty are often quite abstract judging by their failure to reduce poverty.

The 1991 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) as well as the 1994 Beijing Fourth World Conference on women (FWCW) interpreted birth control as an anti-poverty and pro-human rights issue. However, the converse, where people exercise their rights in choosing to have a large family is rarely considered but it is often assumed that such rights would be exercised for smaller families. This reflects global imposition of Western biases and assumption about family size.

Equitable income distribution and improvements in women’s lives via gender equity are essential ingredients of the Human Development agenda of the 1990s. However both the ICPD and FWCW associate redistribution and human development with fertility control policies since improvements in women’s status in Third World Countries were viewed as critical for population control. However despite its seeming sympathy for the plight of poor people, especially Third World women, the repackaged redistributionist approach through the Human Development framework is capable of reinforcing cultural domination through values such as individual rights promoted by it.

The imposition of western values questions the world view of Third World people and their entire way of life while valorising western values in the process. Would not this challenge of people's traditional practices represent a cultural imposition which may end up being destructive to people's choices?

The vocabulary of gender equity generally adopted in international conferences and policy documents contrasts sharply with the tokenistic funds and staffing of women's bureaux and national machinery. Furthermore, notions of gender equity and human development often exist alongside with globalisation policies which foster global inequality biased against Third World Countries. This is sure to marginalise women and other vulnerable groups still more. Indeed as shown by the example of population policies, the social dynamics behind such policies are often neglected.

Even the much touted evidence of a negative correlation between education and fertility rates have been disproved as being weak in certain cases and dependent on the level of economic development as well as on the social structure and cultural milieu (Furedi, 1997). The growing concern of Third World scholars and activists about cultural imposition masquerading as 'development' has led to increasing attention by such scholars to retheorising issues such as race, colonialism and global inequalities and their effects on women (Parpart 2000).

The feminist political economy framework has criticised western feminist construction of the life experiences of Third World women as being too limited and dominated by western biases and assumptions. Consequently it fails to present an accurate picture of the experiences of Third World women especially on the issue of gender power relations in precolonial societies. The feminist political economy perspective regards women as having a greater autonomy and control over their lives in precapitalist societies (Stamp, 1989; Awe, 1992). Stamp (1989) identified three limitations of Western feminist theories that the feminist political economy approach has sought to correct. First is the inappropriate theorising about the nature of non-Western societies (including gender relations) that gives primacy to the economic rather than its complex interaction with the political and ideological aspects of society. According to Stamp 1989:19, an example is:

*“the ideology of kinship and the practice of kin relations in precolonial Africa (which) far from being the mere superstructure of production relations, are central to the shaping of production relations. Economic work and the fulfillment of kin obligations were inseparable both conceptually and in practice”*

A second limitation is the conceptualisation of the public/private dichotomy where men are viewed as inhabiting a public and more visible sphere and women the private. Gender-sensitive case studies, for example Awe's (1994) historical accounts of women's role in precolonial Nigeria have challenged this assumption. Finally, the assumption that concepts such as the 'family' and 'household' have similar meanings and structures as in the West have also been challenged (Dwyer and Bruce, 1988). Stamp (ibid:20) acknowledged the contributions of studies belonging to the feminist political economy genre in “challenging Western epistemological assumptions regarding the universality of many features of economics, politics and gender relations’

There is no doubt whatsoever that culturally and /or traditionally, women have occupied various traditional positions of power in most part of Africa and, particularly in Yoruba kingdom right from the pre-colonial period (Afonja, Akindele and Soetan, forthcoming:3). Infact, Afonja (1986) gave analytical relevance to issues of gender identity, equality and struggle for same in her analysis of the position of women in relations to power and authority in traditional Yoruba society. Afonja's analysis clearly showed the deepseated nature of disregard for women's initial relevance in the monarchical structure of the Yoruba race, when she claimed that "the foundation of patrilineal rule of succession to the highest political office, that of the monarch, was laid when Oduduwa by-passed his two eldest daughter to confer authority over new territories on his seven princes (Ibid), her generative analysis of Yoruba history from AD100 shows that "the monarch was (and still) a source of legitimate authority for women either as direct monarchs or as Regents" thus, constituting a gender identity and/or its formation and perpetuation. The monarchy as a culture based activity not only reserved for men but also for the women if not for the "logic of domination" and philosophy of "men as victimizers and women as victims" is decipherable from Afonja (Ibid) position that:

*women became rulers in one or more of the following ways: they were picked by the Ifa oracle on the prediction that their reign would be more prosperous than that of direct heirs to the throne; they acted as regents for young heirs to the throne for extended periods of time, or in cases where the Ifa oracle was unable to find a suitable heir and having shown immense ability as regents they were allowed to rule.*

This situation spanned the length and breadth of most if not all Yoruba kingdoms including the source - Ile-Ife. Infact, there were instances where women ruled throughout as the substantive monarchs. This happened in Akure, Ondo State where three female rulers occupied the throne between 1393 and 1414 and Ado-Ekiti in Ekiti-State where one female ruler, Yeyenirewu, ruled between 1511 and 1552. It equally happened in Ile-Ife where Luwe was a female Ooni (ruler of Ife) as well as in Egba land where Tenilade, Erelu and Latoni respectively reigned as the traditional rulers (Afonja, 1986).

Equally, positions of authority as traditional chiefs existed for women as well. These were at the lower levels of the traditional hierarchy, they (i.e. the positions) were indicative of the cultural values, norms and beliefs which, combined, gave a pride of place to gender identity and social cohesion needed for the peaceful and crisis – free existence of the people while reducing social exclusion or ostracization. Through these culture-based positions certain culture-based activities were performed including the governance and development of their communities.

However, while acknowledging the potentials of the feminist political economy approach for re-theorising the position of women in precolonial societies more accurately , it is also important to realise that not all local traditions are beneficiary to women. Hence there is the need to challenge cultural traditions and practices that encourage and subordinate women while valorising and encouraging those which promote gender equity.

In Africa, the male factor is culturally paramount. Because of the strong impact of communal ethos and the desire to conform, many women suffer in silence. A vivid example of the way tradition controls the girl child and women is the beliefs that necessitates parental agreement and the husband's consent before a girl or woman can seek medical help. In many parts of Africa, this endangers women's life and consequently limits their participation in development. The girl child and women are marginalized in education and this has health, economic, social and political implications. The male factor then becomes pivotal in gender relations and development whereas in advanced nations where women are free to take decisions affecting their health and well-being, tradition and culture are less crucial. Perhaps the most serious aspect of the problem is that the society is not sufficiently aware of the specific needs of women in health issues.

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In many parts of the North of Nigeria, women need the approval of their husbands to go to the hospital. This makes the male factor very important. Yet in the same part of Nigeria, there is a Hausa proverb that reflects the mindset of the people, "A healthy girl belongs to her husband, a sick woman belongs to her parents." This justifies the neglect of women with serious reproductive health conditions such as VVF and other complications arising from harmful traditional practices including early child marriage and violence against women.

Many traditional beliefs that validate certain harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, early marriage of girls to men old enough to be their fathers, have consequences on development. In its diverse forms, this causes serious reproductive health problems later in life. Some recent studies confirm that the reason why FGM is still carried out takes root in the belief that an uncircumcised girl is a potential prostitute. Men feel more strongly about this in areas of Nigeria where circumcision is the norm. Some support their position by quoting traditional beliefs such as the Yoruba proverb, "Idan obinrin akete asewo", "A woman's clitoris is the hat of prostitution." In many parts of Nigeria, it is believed that men prefer girls circumcised to avoid immorality and extra marital infidelity. Women also believe that uncircumcised girls will not find any husband. A girl who runs away from the social celebration of adulthood involving circumcision is believed to bring shame to her family and reproach as well as social alienation. This

explains why the practice has continued and the importance of the male factor and a change in cultural attitudes and practices.

Described as the most controversial and widely discussed of all harmful traditional practices, FGM has been defined as comprising of all procedures which involve partial or total removal or injury to the external female genitalia whether for cultural or other reasons. It is reported to be practised in over 30 countries with an estimated 2million girls at risk annually. A fundamental reason for its practice in all countries where it exists is a deeply held cultural belief about its efficacy. Box 1 highlights some of the reasons why it is practised (CGSP, 1998:48).

#### Box 1

##### Reasons Why FGM is Practised

FGM is practised mainly for cultural, religious and physical reasons. As a strategy for controlling female sexuality, it is also believed to prevent promiscuity, early pregnancy and complications during labour. Among the cultural groups which practice FGM, these are positive reasons for sustaining society.

FGM is responsible for many kinds of reproductive health complications and the male factor is crucial in any campaign against FGM. Policies to enhance the eradication of this tradition is long overdue. In many parts of the world today, there is an outcry against female circumcision. But cultural attitude delays the process. (Richards, 1976, Badri, 1992, Onadeko, 1996, UNDS, 1998). This practice has been a tradition in many parts of the world including Africa, Asia, North America, Europe and the Middle East. It has a strong grip on societies that believe in it because of its socio-cultural and religious origin. Its origin has been traced to as far back as 500BC as Greek writers made references to female circumcision. (Rushwan, 1983) Male circumcision is also practiced in many societies but it is more for cosmetic reasons and does not have as much health hazards as female circumcision. African countries that practice it actively include Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal and many other Francophone West African countries and most countries in North Africa. Many nations have legislated against it but many African countries including Nigeria among others have continued the practice.

Its negative effects on women and girls include reduced or lost sexual sensation, infections, persistent menstrual pain, painful intercourse, infertility, complications at childbirth and keloid scar formation and abscesses (CGPS 1998:26).

It is encouraging to know that in many Southern African countries, female circumcision is not practiced and in South Africa and parts of Zimbabwe, they have a different belief and tradition that enhances women's sexuality instead of retard it through circumcision. In Nigeria, there are also some societies who do not believe in or practice female circumcision. The most classical example is Ijebu society of Ogun State. Much research is currently going on concerning the nature and problems of FGM in Nigeria.

Many NGOs, government agencies, research teams in Universities and Teaching Hospitals are intensifying research and the male factor is a focal point of on-going research on women's reproductive health including problems related to FGM. There is a consensus that this form of operation is based on ignorance and the desire for social and communal conformity.

This inhuman and often hazardous operation is still practiced in many parts of Nigeria with attendant health complications. Ranging from sunna (cutting of the tip of the prepuce of the clitoris, the intermediate (excision of the entire clitoris and the labia minora/majora and stitching them together but leaving an opening), to infibulation, circumcision has been identified as harmful to the health of the girl child and has serious implications on reproductive health. *Yanka gishiri* or salt cut is one of the most problematic health hazards in the Northern part of Nigeria that cause serious reproductive health hazards to women. Circumcision is often carried out on baby girls but in many parts of Southern Nigeria it is a social celebration of adolescence that affects girls from the age of twelve and above. This involves annual festivals and virgin dances.

There are other kinds of traditional beliefs and attitudes that impair women's reproductive health. These include wife battering and other forms of domestic violence against women, rape, early marriage and early pregnancy, Wanka Jego, or hot bath in puerperium, and using dangerous herbs to control pregnancy. Onadeko has done extensive work in this area and she identified the chastity belt involving the closure of the external genital organs with special iron locks or pins (Onadeko, 1996). Superstitious beliefs about child birth and forced squatting in labour are some others.

Widowhood practices are also vital in looking at women's health as some of the rites endanger women's subsequent well being. Widows are forced to eat dangerous materials to prove that they have no hand in the husband's death. They are subjected to inhuman treatment because of the traditional beliefs that a woman is a potential husband killer or witch and there are no equivalent predominant beliefs about men. Examples of such beliefs include these Yoruba proverbs, Obinrin to bimo fun ni ko ni ko ma pa ni -"The fact that a woman bears your children is no guarantee that she will not kill you." Widowhood practices are more serious in many parts of the Eastern states, however. Male child preference is another reason why women are subjected to destructive practices. There is a general ideological attitude that convinces people especially men that having no male child is like living a life of no fulfilment since inheritance rights are denied girls in most cases. The girl child who is born when a boy is preferred is a victim of neglect and abuse as well as her mother. All these have health consequences. The Yorubas' attitude is representative of the attitude to male preference, Kaka ko san fun iya aje, ofi gbogbo omo re bi obinrin, -"Instead of improving her reputation, the witch

woman continues to give birth to female children." This implies that if her children were male, this would have redeemed her image of being a witch.

## Box 2

### Inheritance Rights in Kenya

Customary laws in parts of Kenya dictate that sons have exclusive rights to inherit from their fathers. Wives and unmarried daughters have the right to be maintained and married daughters have no rights to the father's property. A widow's maintenance right is lost if she marries a relative of the deceased or returns to her home (Martin and Hashi, 1992 cited in UNECA, undated)

There are many other beliefs couched in proverbs that limit women's rights or determine men and women's negative and destructive attitudes to health. These proverbs often show the *raison d'être* or rationale for people's attitude to women's health. A Yoruba proverb explains why women who need more nourishing food during reproductive age do not get it as it is considered culturally incorrect to eat better food than her husband: "Bale ile itan eye ni ije; iyale ile ehin ni ije." This discriminatory eating tradition means, "The man of the house eats the chicken thigh or drumstick; the woman of the house eats the back part of the chicken." No wonder when there is economic hardship some men eat good food and get balanced diet in their places of work only to give an insufficient fund for the family's general feeding allowance. This has serious consequences on the nutritional needs of the women during pregnancy and post-natal period. Gloria Emeagwali is right when she asserts that economic hardship takes more toll on women. In her word, "Women pay the price" for structural adjustment and similar economic programmes. Men's traditional attitude to such situations also have to change for such problems to be solved.

### (iii) Tradition and Women's Rights

As regards women's rights, there are many beliefs that undermine women's right and directly or indirectly shape women's attitude to their suffering and that are also related to their reproductive roles. A woman is generally not supposed to have a voice or an opinion or even complain in some cases:

- woke obu la na- agba egwu nwayi na- aku oye o bula na -anwu mgbe Chi ya akpoghi. (Igbo, Eastern Nigeria)
- The man who dances to the flute played by a woman generally goes to the spirit world prematurely.
- Ile ti obinrin ti nse toto arere igi arere ni hu nibe. (Yoruba, Western Nigeria)
- A home where a woman can speak out freely will have the foul smelling *arere* tree growing in the house.

- ( *Arere* tree normally grows in the wild because of its foul odour)
- Odu-okuta cha-nuku igbe le (Igala, Middle Belt, Nigeria) -A woman's place is in the kitchen.

The Igbo proverb encourages men to prove tough in their relationship to their wives as tradition considers tenderness unmasculine.

The strong impact of traditional beliefs as seen in proverbs go beyond the health sector. Gender is highly structured by such traditional beliefs and practices to shape women's social, political, economic and other roles and benefits.

Women's grassroots organisations have been documented as having a long history in Africa with women traditionally coming together to pool resources for mutual assistance mainly at the community level. Such organisations fulfilled a variety of functions and have become very critical for mobilising resources for the survival of women and their families in the harsh economic milieu of SAPs.

For example, informal thrift and credit societies are popularly used as channels for mobilising funds for business start-up and growth in rural areas. Box 3 summarises the findings on the use of informal savings and credit obtained through women's rotating credit and savings societies by Nigerian women (Soetan, 1990).

### Box 3

#### *Uses of informal Credit*

*A preponderant percentage of the female entrepreneurs utilise savings and credit obtaining through rotating and credit societies primarily for investment purposes. These include investment in children's education, financing of business, buying of land or investing in own building. Relative to investment purposes, the secondary use of credit was for consumption comprising mainly of buying food for their families. In the absence of social security and other state sponsored welfare benefits for the poor in Nigeria, some of the women utilised the credit for welfare/social purposes like paying medical bills, social functions including naming ceremonies, funeral ceremonies and for meeting other emergencies like house rent and renovation.*

### **3. The Future Perspective: Lessons learned and Strategies For An Inclusive Cultural Approach To Development**

The foregoing show that the discourse on culture, gender and development needs to shift increasingly towards the heterogeneity of women since women are not a homogenous group in any society. Class, race, religion, age and ethnicity are some of the stratifiers which interact with gender to give women multiple identities that result in multiple realities.

#### **(i) Lesson Learned**

In reviewing the relationship between culture, gender and development, the following lessons can be gleaned:

- The failure of development interventions in the past four decades or so has resulted in little or no improvements in the material conditions of people's lives, indeed both the incidence and depth of poverty appears to be on the increase. A major cause of the crisis in the development debate is that Western conception of economic, political and social realities dominate development thinking. Traditional concepts need to be reflected in development discourse- homegrown models that make use of historical and cultural experiences are critical for the sustainability of development efforts in Africa.
- The imposition of Western values through the development agenda questions and challenges the world view of Third World people while promoting and valorising Western values in the process. This is perceived as reinforcing cultural domination and promoting social dislocation resulting in unsustainable development.
- The vast reservoir of traditional and indigenous knowledge that have sustained societies for hundreds of years should be tapped for income and employment generation in the face of increasing poverty and unemployment in sub Saharan Africa.
- Western feminist construction of the life experiences of African women is dominated by Western biases and assumptions often criticised as being limited and inaccurate. There is the need for a more inclusive re-theorising and reconstruction of development that accounts for the voices of African scholars, activists, grassroots women and other vulnerable groups.
- There is no gainsaying the fact that the cultural approach is critical for evolving more holistic development outcomes. However, this should not overlook the need for changing negative traditional practices that put women in double jeopardy by impeding social progress and gender equity. Negative traditional practices, beliefs and laws that are harmful to women and derogatory of their status will need to be changed. At the same time, women's grassroots organisations that facilitate women's collective and individual empowerment should be encouraged and made central to initiatives that promote bottom-up development.

## **1. Sectoral Strategies**

It is important that sectoral strategies target sectors that impinge most on the lives women and other vulnerable groups. These include health, education, water and sanitation, agriculture, transport and the informal sector. Initiatives which utilise culturally sensitive approaches to mobilising community input and support for development programmes and projects are expected to be more sustainable since they promote community ownership. Sectoral interventions should also be mindful of existing community structures, exploring ways of utilising such structures in programme and project design and implementation.

## **2. Sensitisation Workshops**

As a follow-up to the conference on culture in Mexico, MONDICAL, many regions have organised sensitisation workshops. Examples are the Sensitisation Workshops on *Culture Gender & Development for Eastern and Southern African English Speaking Countries*, Addis Ababa, 8-11 April, 1997. Another is the workshop on *Culture. Population and Poverty Eradication*, a sub-regional workshop for Eastern and Southern Africa held in Kampala, Uganda, April 2nd, 1997.

## **3. Country Programmes Approach**

This includes the roles of country-based cultural programs and institutions locally or internationally sponsored. Gender awareness, cultural programmes, skills training and capacity-building are some of the focus.

## **4. Direct Support Programmes.**

Many international funding agencies foster direct support programs in development that emphasises the cultural approach. These include the British Council, EEC, SIDA, DENIDA, Ford, Rockefeller MacArthur, USAID and a host of others.

## **5. Institutional Strategy**

Institutions, especially. Universities and NGOs are actively involved in sponsoring research programs workshops, sensitisation seminars and baseline studies based on the cultural approach to development and many mainstream gender into the development programs.

## **6. Participatory Development**

This involves a bottom-up approach that carries the grassroots level of the society along in a participatory way.

## **Conclusion/Recommendations**

This study has examined the interconnection between gender, culture and development by questioning western conceptualisations of development and prescriptions for gender equity. The study argues that such prescriptions are generally devoid of cultural considerations and hence represent a cultural imposition of western values that seek to challenge and displace traditional values and practices. Hence rather than foster development, such policies which often derive from inegalitarian neoliberal strategies favouring marginalisation of Third World countries alongside redistributionist human development approach have failed to alleviate poverty

Cultural approach has become a major factor in development strategies that can enhance the gains of other strategies. As long as the goal of development is to improve the welfare of the people, development policies need to have a workable framework in the plan of action and elaborate guidelines. The policy and strategy should aim at social welfare, economic and political empowerment, grass-root bottom-down approaches. The goal should include increase in the productivity of women's work, men's work and enhance their place in the social and economic structure. A holistic integrated approach is desirable. Mainstreaming and sector strategies should take culture on board for acceptance and sustainability. Gender will have to be disaggregated for effective planning, execution and evaluation of projects. The goals of women and cultural desirable concerns need to be a focus as the need arises.

Extensive training programs on gender and cultural awareness are important. Key concepts in gender and cultural approach also need to be given a central place. International policies on gender and culture need to be translated into sectoral and country-specific actions. Tools for programming, organisation and execution need to be clearly set out. African culture has encouraged women's visibility in the private and men's visibility in the public spheres. To change this traditional orientation without causing social dislocation in particular to the family structure are crucial to any development program. Strategies for individual and communal survival are equally important.

In the final analysis, development should not disregard existing traditional social order but seek to transform it. Participatory development involves tools that initiate change by helping the people to see that development makes life better in visible ways. Traditional modes of managing natural resources are problematic and to change the existing structure involves changing the traditional, in-set. The 'slash and burn'. Farming method is popular in many parts of Africa. nomadic grazing, bush burning, deforestation are examples of traditional methods that damage the environment. To change such involve changing traditional attitudes before one can change the system. This is where a cultural approach become an imperative that is becoming increasingly central to development issues.

A more inclusive, bottom-up approach to development discourse and policies needs to account for women's multiple cultural identities and rationalities while exploring avenues for meaningful global equity. Western assumptions of rationality transmit western cultural values imposed through global policies and programs and stifle the voices of different categories of woman and other vulnerable groups. Consequently, a

more inclusive development discourse and policy making process which reflects the voices of different categories of women and allows for cultural pluralism is imperative for sustainable development and gender equity

## Notes

- Burama K. Sagnia, Coordinator, African Itinerary College for Culture and Development, in a Keynote Address delivered at the Sensitisation Workshop on 'Culture, Gender and Development in Eastern and Southern African English-Speaking Countries, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 8-11, April 1997, p. 7.
2. loc. Cit.
  3. op. Cit. P.8.
  4. Rosemarie Tong, (1989)

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