

INDIGENOUS PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

Colonialism and pervasive dominance of effects of globalization have robbed Africa of her rich and well cherished traditions. The values, norms and traditions with which traditional societies planned and administered their domains in a peaceful manner have been eroded. While the virtues embedded in these values have fast disappeared, the resultant vices hunt and destroy the modern day socio- economic fabrics and threaten our general existence. This paper therefore explores the traditional practices, norms and values, lessons therein and challenges they face in the contemporary time.

The study employed Key Informant Interviews (KII) as method of data collection. Old people who are (embodiments of traditional values and norms) in some selected indigenous rural areas in Oyo state were interviewed. What informed this sample is the traditional knowledge base of the issues being investigated. Content analysis was thereafter used to present the results.

Findings showed that plethora of indigenous practices were used in the past to administer economic, socio- cultural, political and environmental issues and had yielded good results. It also revealed that most of these norms and traditional values had been very efficiently used to promote good planning and discourage maladministration. Conversely, the study found out that most of these values, norms and practices were eroded as a result of contact with Colonialism, western civilization and inferiority complex on the part of African people.

The paper therefore recommends the revival of traditional norms and values, incorporating same into school curricular. Also, government at all levels should promote the use of indigenous languages since most of these values and norms are housed in the languages.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Society, Indigenous Knowledge, Traditional Values and Indigenous Languages.

INTRODUCTION

Long before the advent of Colonialism in Nigeria like other countries in Africa, indigenous people had their ways of live, living harmoniously as a society. In the North, South, West and the East, clans and communities had existed with very vibrant administrations before the Europeans ever dreamt of discovering Africa. They organized themselves in such ways that virtually all aspects of their lives were in accordance with laid down rules and regulations, with absolute compliance. Though not written down, norms and values passed from generations to generations were largely used to guide and control all human endeavours. Planning, no matter how crude was in place and the then administrators strictly and whole heartedly executed it to yield best results.

Once they are relayed to the inhabitants of the community (in case of new settlers), or grow to know why and how the adults behaved, (in case of the indigenes) laws, norms, values and traditions are religiously adhered to believing (and of course, as it always happened) that defiance would spell doom for those who act in the contrary. Accordingly, socio- economic fabrics, political and economic affairs, environmental related issues and security among other areas of human activities were strictly guided.

With all these as guiding principles, generations upon generations lived peacefully, economic roles were diligently carried out, political affairs executed faithfully and lives were generally secured. Cases of indolence, dishonesty, robbery and leadership rot were at the barest minimum. Contentment, honesty, bravery, hard work and the spirit of “our family name must be protected” were the order of the day.

These developments continued up till the period of colonialism and even beyond. But unfortunately, in the contemporary time, all these virtues have disappeared, no thank to African contact with the Europeans and the recent pervasive dominance of globalization which spread like wild fire. Consequently, indigenous values, norms and traditions are jettisoned for foreign values. Whether good or bad, all that matters to the modern day African person is thinking, acting and dressing and behaving in foreign ways. Values that were hitherto held in high esteem are no longer seen as virtues, whoever holds unto them is rather labeled archaic, conservative, village or bush person or worst still uneducated. The so called western civilization has in many areas pitched African people against their cherished values and tradition. The wisdom used by the fore fathers in communal child upbringing has fast disappeared. Quite a few number of individual in today’s African societies cares about the name of their families. Whether or not it spoils is never their concern. In the name of civilization and/or becoming wealthy overnight, human sanctity is no longer respected. Raping of minors, killing for rituals, fraudulent acts and all forms of decadence become order of the day.

The resultant effects of these western styles of living are disastrous- total collapse of morality, loss of respect, dishonesty, prostitution, unfaithfulness and decadence are now rampant in the society. Besides, Colonialism, Neocolonialism and Globalization have robbed us of our cherished values and tradition which for centuries had regulated human existence in Africa. It is against this background that this study attempts to bring to the fore once more the intrinsic values embedded in indigenous practices in Nigeria with a view to utilizing same for contemporary Societal Planning and Sustainable Development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Indigenous Knowledge

A large body of literature on indigenous knowledge (IK) exists (Warren, 1990). However, for better understanding of the concept, it is important to explore the definition. According to (Rajasakeran et al., 1992), Indigenous Knowledge is defined as a systematic body of knowledge acquired by local people through the accumulation of experiences, informal experiments and intimate understanding of the environment in a given culture. It is also defined to mean the knowledge belonging to a specific ethnic group, for example: 'Indigenous knowledge is the local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. It is the basis for local-level decision-making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural resource management, and a host of other activities in rural communities (Karin and Jun, 2002). Other useful definitions as given by op cit (2002) include: 'Indigenous knowledge as the information base for a society, which facilitates communication and decision-making. Indigenous information systems are dynamic, and are continually influenced by internal creativity and experimentation as well as by contact with external systems. Or Indigenous knowledge as the knowledge that people in a given community have developed over time, and continue to develop. It is based on experience, often tested over centuries of use, adapted to local culture and environment, dynamic and changing. Local people such as farmers, both men and women, are believed to be the custodians (Musa and Musi 2002). It is believed to be a dynamic knowledge system, simple but very useful in providing a framework upon which technical and scientific questions are built. IK localized knowledge systems which are unique to a particular society or ethnic group, as against the international knowledge system generated by researchers (Warren, 1990).

Concept of Sustainable Development

The term, sustainable development, was popularized in "Our Common Future", a report published by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987, also known as the Brundtland report. It defined sustainable development as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, p.43). Others view sustainable development as a balancing act between the economy and the environment meaning that the economy is an entity that is separate from the environment, where the latter inevitably loses out (Caccia, 2001).

The concept was suggested as an alternative strategy for combining the survival of human society and protection of the environment. It is observed that increasing consumption, combined with population growth, mean that humanity's demands on the planet have more than doubled over the past 45 years (WWF, 2008, p. 2). These observed impacts are revealed in a number of disturbing trends- Global biodiversity is on the decline, and species in all groups with known trends are, on average, being driven closer to extinction. So also are the indigenous knowledge and traditional practices most of which are seriously being threatened.

Urban and regional planning as a discipline is not limited to physical planning; rather it entails also the economic and social issues. The social fabric of the society equally plays an important role of ensuring a sustainable development; this explains

why the concept of sustainable development is agreed to be standing on the tripod of environment, economic and social issues. Over the centuries, indigenous knowledge or traditional practices have been recognized to immensely contribute to the development of human race particularly in Africa. This is evident in the successes recorded in various fields of human endeavors such as agriculture, economic, social and environmental as well as administrative settings long before colonialism. However, as scientists struggle to respond to global challenges, they have increasingly distanced themselves from local ways of solving problems. Local solutions were even discriminated against as hindering progress, outdated, “old wives tales” or simply just unfashionable. As we “modernized” our societies, a “degree” in traditional or indigenous knowledge was not planned for. Hence, we overlooked its potential as a resource and even further neglected the knowledge that women and men, families and communities had developed themselves for centuries (World Bank, 2004)

Addressing the extent to which traditional or indigenous knowledge can help in attaining sustainable development, the World Bank, (2004) posits further that there is none of the Millennium Development Goals to which indigenous knowledge cannot contribute. It has helped to reduce hunger and poverty in India, it has improved primary education and enrollment by using local language as a means of instruction in West Africa, it has enabled men in Senegal to understand the impact of female circumcision on women and empowered women to move towards eradicating the practice, it has helped to reduce child mortality in Eritrea and maternal mortality in Uganda, it provides primary healthcare to millions of Africans, it has helped communities in Mozambique to manage their coastal natural resources, and it has helped to build partnerships between the weak and the strong in Ghana to share wealth. This underscores the capacity of the so called “out dated” practices in solving most of the world chronic problems.

Traditional Medicine Practice and Health Care Delivery in Nigeria

World Health Organization W.H.O.(1979), traditional medicine is the sum total of all knowledge and practices whether explicable or not used in the diagnosis, prevention and elimination of physical, mental imbalance and relying exclusively on practical experience and observation down from generation to generation whether verbally or in writing. The importance of Health in any commodity can never be over-emphasized, hence, it is seen as the foundation of all happiness. Before the coming of orthodox medicine traditional medicine has developed the world over in response to the health requirements of the people. Responses to these needs brought about the development of various traditional systems of using locally available resources for prevention and cure of various ailments. In order to combat these diseases and infections, Idehen and Oshodin, (2007) in a study of “insights into Benin traditional methods of disease prevention” noted that the people of Benin depend on herbs and roots which are medicinal in nature like “alombhokhor” (popularly called scent leaves) “ohugben”, asthma weed, and the bark of trees (red wood, iroko tree and almond) often applied in treatment of infections. It is a practice derived from the values and perception of the members of the community (Owumi, 1993). Even with orthodox medicine, larger percentages of the Nigerian populace still consult the traditional medicine practitioners, counting on the efficacy of such practices to cure malaria, stomach disturbances, dislocation and several other known ailments in African context. According to Adesina, (2008); Nigerians have a deep belief and reliance on the services of the traditional practitioners for their health care needs. An estimated 75 percent of the population still prefers to solve their health problems by consulting the traditional healers (Nigerian Tribune, March 2008). The World Health Organisation (W.H.O.) has also recognized the central position traditional medicine plays in the 21st century, specifically in the areas of prevention and management of diseases such as

malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, among others. This led to the launch of its first ever comprehensive traditional medicine strategy in 2002 (Adesina (2008). While looking at the sources of knowledge of traditional medicine, Owumi (1993) observes that traditional medical practitioners acquire herbal knowledge either through inheritance or apprentices. He stressed further that in the past, many of them practiced the art as a hobby or as a form of community service with little or no financial rewards thus making the practice “pure and efficacious” and passing it through generations to maintain harmony between body, mind and soul within the societal settings. The various ethnic groups in Nigeria have different traditional health care practitioners aside their western health care counterparts. The Yoruba call them ‘Babalawo’, the Igbo call them ‘Dibia’, while the Hausa refer to them as ‘Boka’. The most interesting thing to note is the specializations that have evolved over time. For instance, there exist specialists such as herbalists, bone-setters, psychiatrics, and birth attendants, among several others. They usually rely on roots, leaves, mineral substances, animal parts and certain other methods such as prayers, divinations and incantations (Owumi and Jerome 2008).

Traditional Agricultural Practices

The potential use of Indigenous Knowledge in agriculture is widely acknowledged (Parrish, 1994; Dialla, 1994; Tabor and Hutchinson, 1994; Slikkerveer, 1993). It was asserted that Indigenous Knowledge has much to offer for sociological and cultural diversity and resource management and that indigenous people are an integral part of the ecosystem they manage.

Food is the most important basic necessity of life, others being clothing and shelter (Maslow 1943). Traditionally, African people have devised various methods of producing abundant food for both family consumption and commercial purposes. Farming practices such as shifting cultivation, crop rotation and mixed cropping among others have been practiced to enhance soil fertility and improved yield. Mulching used to regulate temperature and prevent leaching of soil. Also, different practices have been imbibed to tackle poverty among the populace. For instance, the *Jatropha Curcas* Plant Project in Mali promotes the production and processing of *Jatropha* (Physic Nut; Euphorbiaceae family). Growing the plant helps to control erosion and to improve the soil in a semi-arid environment. Processing (extracting seeds) the *Jatropha* results in income (especially for women) renewable energy and contributes to poverty reduction (Reinhold Metzler, 1996). *Jatropha*, of Latin American origin, was originally introduced for producing lubricant oil. It is a drought-resistant perennial and can be used as a natural fence. *Jatropha* hedges protect food crops and gardens from livestock and reduce soil erosion. The hedges also help to reduce conflicts between the farmers and livestock owners over animals causing crop damage. Reinhold Metzler, (1996) also argues that the revival of the traditional practice by women who harvested the seeds for medical purposes and local soap production has led to profitable soap-making enterprises managed by women and a reduction of poverty.

In the area of pest management using traditional technique Parrish (1994) reported on indigenous post-harvest knowledge in an Egyptian oasis to control pest. A new approach to pest management was later introduced in the western desert of Egypt to encourage their adoption in place of indigenous practices. However, Parrish reported that some farmers stated that the introduction of these new pesticides had made pest problems worse and created environmental problems as well. In this direction therefore, Tabor and Hutchinson (1994), had argued that development policy that undermines or contradicts viable indigenous resource management strategies is unlikely to be sustainable.

Economy and Traditional Practices

In centuries long before the advent of imperialism in Africa, African people had adopted several traditional practices and knowledge to interact among themselves economically. The use of cowries as means of exchange was used shortly after trade by barter and other means of transaction were engaged to ensure an economic society devoid of cheat and chaos. At the initial period, trade by barter prevailed along with limited special purpose currencies. But the problem of double coincidence of wants which is a major weakness of trade by barter naturally led to the evolution of other means of exchange, such as the general purpose currencies that were acceptable for all trading transactions. Before the introduction of the British currency, some of the major trade or general purpose currencies in Nigeria were cowries, brass rods, manilla, copper rods and iron money (Umumu). Transactions with the various currencies were made in places where they were accepted as legal tender. Traditional rulers even employed these currencies for running their administration (Ekundare, 1973). These currencies were also used to establish a capital market where people could borrow money, thereby facilitating the process of raising capital internally and this aided economic growth and development. Thus, through the use of these currencies, institutions for capital formation came into being in different societies in pre-colonial Nigeria. The most widespread was the *isusu*, which was operated among the Yoruba, Igbo and Ibibio. (Sirley, 1964). The *isusu* "provided credit on generous terms to members who collected the total contribution of members in turns, according to an agreed formula.

In a similar manner, the use of what is known in Yoruba as "aro or owe" were employed in many African settings to assist friends and relations or peer groups. Members come together to assist their colleagues in farming activities, building construction and other endeavors requiring assistance from larger number of people to accomplish. This is done rotationally for all the members until it goes round without charging any fees. Many individuals who ordinarily could not have built houses nor had large farms had through this means become landlords and successful farmers.

Traditional Practices and Environmental Sanitation

Health they say is wealth, traditional societies are not oblivious of the importance of maintaining a clean environment, and hence, practices which promoted hygienic environment are constantly practiced and monitored. For instance, the promotion of personal health such as washing of hands before eating and after meals is encouraged. Also, people are advised not to shake hands with strangers as a strategy to avoid infectious diseases (Idehen and Oshodin, 2007). Kitchen utensils are washed immediately after each meal to avoid being contaminated.

Environmental sanitation by early morning sweeping of the house and compound is encouraged. Both men and women are involved in the cleaning exercise which is done before seven in the morning and before they set out for the farm or market. Oral hygiene is also encouraged by the chewing of roots and branches derived from medicinal plants. This is not only meant to clean the mouth, but the medicinal composition of the chewing stick will also prevent mouth odour and treat germs in the mouth.

Socio-political Settings in Traditional Africa

Administrative grandeur in Africa predated colonialism, there were several established empires with track record of good administrative prowess across the nooks and crannies of traditional Africa, in fact, most of them were later meant to be adopted by the colonial officials through whom they governed for better administration and development. The empires of

Mali and Songhay in West Africa, Tshaka in Zululand, Mossi to the East of Mali and the kingdom of Dahomey in the central part of Africa were some of the most powerful in wealth, authority and territorial expansion.

Underscoring this establishment, Rodney (1972) in his book “How Europe underdeveloped Africa” clearly demonstrates that in the fifteenth century (period of first encounter between Europeans and Africans), the continent had already established empires in the East, Central, West, and South of the continent. (Rodney, 1972). Coming down to Nigeria, the likes of Oyo empire, Benin empire and Hausa-Fulani administration among others were already well established and functioning long before the colonialism of the British. There were also varieties of social activities rich in diverse cultural background.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

This study employs the following three theories in order to clearly illuminate the core understanding of the main theme of the study:

Modernisation Theory

This theory situates itself within the concept of modernity which refers to what is ‘up-to-date’ in a particular place at a particular time. Harrison (1988), notes that it is an aspect of westernization, involving changes which are in contrast with the previous traditional situation. Modernization essentially means the process of change towards those social, economic and political systems developed in America and Western Europe between the 17th and 19th centuries. The concept of modernization incorporates the full spectrum of the transition and drastic transformation that a traditional society has to undergo in order to become modern (Hussain, et al., 1981; Lenin, 1964). According to modernity, policies intended to raise the standard of living of the poor often consist of disseminating knowledge and information about more efficient techniques of production, socialisation and education. For instance, Ellis and Biggs, (2001) posits that the agriculture modernisation process involves encouraging farmers to try new crops, new production methods and new marketing skills. In general, modernization led to the introduction of hybrids, the green house technology, genetically modified food, use of artificial fertilizers, insecticides, tractors and the application of other scientific knowledge to replace traditional agricultural practices. This view is shared by (Smith, 1973: 61) who pointed out that modernisation is about exchanging of older agriculture practices with something more recent. In other words, Agriculture societies can therefore be regarded as modern when they display specific characteristics. The extent to which these characteristics are exhibited gives an indication of the degree of modernity that has been reached (Matunhu, 2011). This idea is not however limited to agriculture alone, it spans all other aspects of life of African people such as health, economy and socio-political spheres among others. This explains the gradual replacement of African “older” ways of life with western “modern” ideologies leading to fast disappearance of African values, customs and traditions.

Dependency Theory

This theory, though tilt towards economic and development, also lends credence to the erosion of African values and traditions. Dependency theory posits that the cause of the low levels of development in less economically developed countries (LEDC's) is caused by their reliance and dependence on more economically developed countries (MEDC's) in other words, it asserts that LEDC's will remain less developed because the surplus that they produce will be siphoned off by MEDC's - under the guise of multinational corporations. There is, as such, no profit left for reinvestment and development

(Vincent, 1996) The basic message of dependency school is that the development of the metropolis was a result of the active underdevelopment of the non-metropolis communities. Put differently, the metropolis is dependent for its development on the underdevelopment of its satellite. For instance, human capital has flowed and continues to move away from Africa to the developed world. Rodney (1972) rightly noted that during the pre-colonial period; from mid fifteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, Africa was cornered into the selling human beings (shipped as slaves to toil on European cotton and sugar cane plantations in America) in exchange for rubbish such as overpriced bottled alcohol (Matunhu, 2011). The author argued further that missionary education curriculum was the main instrument used to destroy the pre-capitalist social structures in Africa. The education system brought about mental impoverishment of Africans by deemphasizing the importance of African values and culture at the same time glorifying that of the whites. And that the basic idea was to disorient the minds and identity of the blacks in preparation for a fertile ground for the exploitation of the continent's human and non-human resources. This along the line dispossessed Africans of their rich cultures and traditions after most of them had been painted "fetish", "barbaric" and "outdated".

The African Renaissance Theory

The African renaissance theory emanates to redress the two previous theories of modernization and dependency and to reshape the direction of African nations. It is an antithesis to the modernization and the dependency paradigms, founded on African values and norms in building blocks of African life. The strength of theory lives in its ability to be adaptable of change and innovations provided they are initiated within the social and value systems of the average African. To think of a true African life is to think of unity, communalism and shared purpose. Therefore, development and poverty reduction strategies for Africa must be informed and embroiled in the African values like 'Ubuntu' in South Africa, 'Humwe' in Zimbabwe, 'Harambee' in Kenya and 'Ujamahaa' in Tanzania (Matunhu, 2011). According to the author, the model rejects the mainstream growth (modernity) and dependency paradigms because they exacerbate poverty and fail to appeal to the African value system. Therefore the theory is campaigning for the use of African indigenous ideas, technologies and resources to deal with African problems as against foreign ideologies.

While this can be argued to be unachievable in totality, at least the very many of the rich cultures and traditions that had in the past molded African destiny can be revived and used for the betterment of this generations and reserved for the unborn ones to promote sustainable development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indigenous Practices applied in Economic Activities

"Before the introduction of currencies, there was trade by barter, a system by which goods and services were exchanged. Later, the use of cowries, copper and salt among other precious materials were used as means of exchange. To be frank, African people have lost virtually all their cherished traditions, in those days, we used to display wares outside, put the equivalent of the price on top of it and a bowl. That money on top informed the buyer of the price; he/she would buy and put money equivalent of the price in the bowl without anybody to attend to him/her. That is trust" (Chief Ikolaba, 88, Oje Owode)

Another interviewee put it simply as:

“My mum who was a textile dealer told me how she markets her wares from village to village in exchange for labourers in my father’s farm. At times, these exchanges could be for other items like farm produce”

(Rabiu Olooko, 69, Oje Owode).

In another development, an aged woman submitted thus:

“Our parents would tell us the children not to sleep after the cocks have crowed, that whoever still sleeps after that time may likely not grow old. This is just to instill hard work and discipline in us” **(Iyalode, 75, Gbelekale)**

“Different economic activities raised finances in many ways: from relatives and friends, “Ajo” (contributions). Securing finances for farming activities or other economic ventures are also done through the practice called “Agbaale” (advance payment). This is a system whereby the farmer approaches produce dealers prior to harvesting period or even before planting. Through an agreement the dealer release some amount to the farmer who invests such on the farm and some other pressing needs with the mandate to sell to such dealer at the end of the season. This system helps farmers, majority of who are denied access to bank loans due to their status”

(Saliu Alamu, 85, Okanlawon)

As can be seen in the above responses, several indigenous knowledge and practices have been used in the past to carry out economic activities, they did not only yield effective results but also helped in regulating their economy. Without having to go through the stress of obtaining loans from banks most of which ask for mostly unmet conditions, they raised money among themselves without any stress.

On the application of traditional practices to health care, the interviewees have these to say:

“All ailments known to human race then have traditional solutions. Apart from the traditional healers who are prominent in the profession, virtually every head of household (Baale) and first wife of the compound (Iyaale) know one leaf, root and bark or the other that are medicinal and that is what they used for different ailments”. She goes further “The “Babalawo” herbalist used herbs of different kind to cure countless of diseases, no cases of health problems are referred to hospital. Not even snake bite or scorpion sting. They removed bullets from accidentally shot human being with ease. It was so common knowledge that for some ailments you need not to see an expert to prescribe. For example, you don’t need to see an expert to know that items such as bark of mahogany tree, pawpaw leaf and lemon are used for fever and malaria”

(Iya sipe, 101, Oke ola)

“All my children were delivered by traditional birth attendant Baba Gbenjo by name. Once we are pregnant, we consult him and he would tell you what to eat and what not to eat, what time of the day to move around and what time not to move around. Once it is time to deliver you go there and he would take care of the delivery exercise, nothing like operation. Even for post natal care he attends to us. Prescribe herbs for both the nursing mother and the new born baby. There were those who specialized in gynecology, wives who were

not pregnant years after marriage are attended to, the man will give them herbs and concoction and by special Grace of God they would conceive and have babies”

(Iyalode, 75, Gbelekale)

“There was a time I had fracture in my leg through accident, it was Baba elese, the bone setter who set my leg for me, and people did go to him from far and near. One interesting thing about him was that he would not collect money, how he operates is that when you go to him he set the bone, after you are healed you can then give him whatever you have as gift not monetary gift anyway”

(Emmanuel Alayan, 78, Tede)

“I remember that back then as children, whenever the community was plagued with Small Pox, there were experts who when consulted prescribed herbs and ointment to rub body and some sacrifices had to be carried round the corners of the town, before you know it the ailment would not only disappear but took very long time, at times years before it surfaced again” in other area the man mentioned that *“it is always encouraged that fruits should not be plucked, they should be allowed to drop before eating, the believe was that until it drops naturally, it is not ripe enough for consumption”*

(Saliu Agedengbe, 71, Oje Owode)

As indicated in the above quotations, many traditional practices have been deployed in the past onto health care services. Virtually all areas of health care have experts who are knowledgeable in the act. The use of herbs to prevent and cure diseases was used and is still being applied till today. Not only that, there were in the past the traditional birth attendants who helped delivered women of their babies, the bone setters and herbalist who specialized in gynecology and optometry among others. This finding is in support of the claim by Elujoba, et al (2005) that traditional medicine has been brought into focus for meeting the goals of a wider coverage of primary health care delivery, not only in Africa but also, to various extents, in all countries of the world. Also confirming this is the popular lyric of Fatai Olowonyo “seleru agbo..... losun fin wo omo re ki dokita o tode” meaning water concoction is what Osun deity used to nurture her children before the advent of modern medicine. (Olowonyo music)

Indigenous Practices and Agriculture

Long before the advent of colonialism and subsequent introduction of modern farming techniques, African people have their traditional techniques of farming. These techniques among other advantages help to control erosion, improve yield and enhance soil fertility. Parrish (1994) particularly observed how traditional agricultural practices help in pest management.

“We employed several traditional ways of farming long before contact with the whites and those methods never failed us. With them there were enough food for the population and we have ways of storing for the scarce seasons. In preparation for planting, we use bush burning to clear farmlands; hoe and cutlass are also used as implement. The use of practices such as shifting cultivation, crop rotation and mixed cropping are used naturally as means of rejuvenation of soil, pest control and soil fertility improvement respectively before

the introduction of fertilizer. One menace of fertilizer on farmland is that it changes the taste of food crops like maize, yam and others to which it is applied”

(Chief Bale Agbe, 70, Oje Owode)

“My son, do you know most of the old varieties of seeds such as maize, cassava, vegetables and others have inbuilt immunity against pests and diseases? That is the wonder of nature and traditional practices employed by our forefathers. It is the contact with the improved seeds that actually introduce most of these pests, majority of which were not known in the history of our farming”

(Tijani Adeniyi, Farmer, 75, Ayetoro)

“There are different ways of storing farm produce; we used on-the-farm improvised stores called “Aba” where the products can be exposed to enough air to prevent high temperature. The products can be stored in these stores for as long as the farmers want to keep them without adding chemicals.”

(Saka Agoro, Farmer, 71, Oke Ako)

“To avoid erosion on farmlands, the pattern of ridges used to be across the contour. This method does not only prevent runoff and washing away of soil nutrients, it ensures collection and retention of rain water on the farm and keep it hydrated for as long as another raining days”

(Adigun Olodo, 64, Bale Agbe Compound)

“One tradition I particularly found very useful is the communal labour contribution known as “aro” some people call it “owe” It involves the coming together of group of farmer, where all members contribute their labour for one person by going to work on his farm with no fee charged. This gesture is rotated until all the members get served. It involved no cost only for the beneficiary to feed members of the group. This practice can be used for any farming activities depending on the choice of the beneficiary. Some use their turn for planting, ridging, weeding or harvesting, while some others even use theirs for building construction”

(Shittu Aje, 78, Mayehun)

“Securing finances for farming activities or other economic ventures are done through the practice called “Agbaale” (advance payment). This is a system whereby the farmer approaches produce dealers prior to harvesting period or even before planting. Through an agreement the dealer release some amount to the farmer who invests such on the farm and some other pressing needs with the mandate to sell to such dealer at the end of the season. This system helps farmers, majority of who are denied access to bank loans due to their status”

(Saliu Alamu, 85, Okanlawon)

Findings on the use of traditional practices and indigenous knowledge on agricultural activities reveal that quite a number of them have not only been applied but have tremendously helped in feeding large population. It also shows that some farming practices are adopted to control pest and diseases both on the farm and in stores, for instance, the use of crop rotation breaks

the chain of occupation of farmland by pest or diseases attached to a particular crop when in the subsequent year another type of crop entirely is planted on the same plot. Also shifting cultivation improves soil fertility while planting of cover crops prevent soil erosion on the farm.

Besides, the study reveals the power of communalism by Africans in achieving success. What is difficult for an individual to do is conveniently achieved with cooperation through a system known as “owe” or “aro” where farmers gather in group to contribute labour for an individual at no cost. There is also “agbaale” (advance payment system) to help farmers and non-farmers alike secure finance to improve on their businesses. These systems have helped many to become successful men and women in African history.

Indigenous Practices and Environmental Sanitation

Since time immemorial, human settlements have developed to incorporate several ways of life. Traditionally, African people do not take lightly the hygienic state of their environment. Hence, the popular saying in Yoruba that “imototo lole segun arun gbogbo” meaning hygienic environment cures all diseases. Therefore, a hygienic environment is not only maintained but also encouraged and instilled on generations as a way of life. The followings are opinions of the people interviewed in the cause of this study:

“It is expected of women and men and the children to clean their environment on daily basis. It is our tradition that women sweep the surroundings early in the morning before they leave for farm or their places of work, and the same is inculcated in the children. In fact, back then when we were young, my mother would tell us it is a taboo for broom not to touch the ground daily and that evil spirits reside in an unclean house. It is also believed that when you are eating and a piece therefrom fall on the ground, you do not pick and eat again because devil must have tasted the food. The wisdom behind all this is just to ensure a hygienic being and sanitised environment”

(Iyalode,75, Oje Owode)

“As a child, one thing you can never try with my mummy was to finish your meal and leave the dishes unwashed, even in the middle of the night. When we were growing up, once any domestic animal (goat, sheep and/or dog lick any of the dishes, we throw it away. There were cases of divorce at the instances of non-observance of cleanliness. At times, if we fail to sweep, our parents denied us foods and other attractive things. There were things regarded as abomination which one is not expected to practise, for instance, you don’t sit in an open mortal, when you drink from a pot of water you don’t pour the unfinished water back into the pot. All these measures ensured that dirtiness and unhygienic practices are not allowed in the least.”

(Emmanuel Alayan, 78, Gbodo)

“Back then when even pit latrine was never introduced, there used to be a site designated as dump site called “Akitan”. It is usually located far in the bush at the back of the community. This is where we dump refuse and defecate. Once anyone visits the site for whatever purpose, the person must wash his/her hands with sand and soap before entering the house. The site is maintained by men who clear it occasionally and

burn the refuse. There is no particular period set for environmental sanitation, once the bush grow, we weed and clean. Cover crops are also planted in the surroundings to prevent erosion.” (Shittu Aje, 78, Mayehun)

Shown above are the results of the application of traditional practices to environmental sanitation in pre-modern days. There are measures taken to ensure cleanliness of the whole surroundings, for instance, early morning sweeping of the house is a routine exercise, and it used to be so religiously observed that non-observance has led many men divorcing their wives, and children denied food and some other necessities. The study also reflects the use of taboos to keep off children and the elderly alike from immoral and unhygienic issues, the breach of which is vehemently rebuked and punished in a hard way. Moreover, the act of maintaining a clean environment is reflected in the designation of a particular site called “Akitan” where defecation and dumping of refuse take place. This site is located far away from the residential area so that the odour and contaminated air can be far from the people, with this development diseases are kept at bay.

Indigenous Practices and Physical Planning

Elements of indigenous knowledge are also extended to the physical environment aspects of African people. Prior to the advent of orthodox planning, people built houses to shelter themselves and opened up roads for circulation. All these have reflected some degree of functionality, aesthetic and safety. They also planted trees around the buildings, not only to serve as wind breaker but also to provide shade under which people gather to socialize (Raheem, 2015) Here are what the interviewees have to say:

“Our buildings exhibit one form of pattern or the other signifying a concept, a compound house is preferred to keep the bond of the family together. It shows the importance attached to family ties. Also, it is a measure to engender good upbringing for our children, everybody in a compound, even beyond, is seen as guardian for the children not just their biological father or mother. This way, they can be monitored for compliance with traditions and upholding of our core values. Protection is also part of the reason we have compound houses”

(Chief Ikolaba, 88, Oje Owode)

“When most of these houses were built there was no planning authority, but traditionally, it is against the norms to build across or near erosion channels. It is also against the tradition to build close to the river, they refer to whoever attempts that as competing with the gods of river and punishment awaits such fellow. So nobody dares venture into that”

(Tijani Adeniyi, 75, Ayetoro)

“The arrangement of the buildings here was planned based on the system of transport in the olden days, because there were no vehicles. So they were planned leaving only foot paths. Most of these buildings were built with sand carried by people on their heads. Most importantly, what informed the arrangement was security of ourselves; you know since we build together, it is difficult for whoever wants to invade us and our children”

(Saliu Agedengbe, 71, Oje Owode)

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(Balode, 73, Oje Owode)

“Almost all the buildings are built given consideration for lighting and air. As you can see, this one where we are has this orientation in order to have enough lighting during the day. Also, most people do not allow their houses to face the west because it is believed to be the direction from which storm originates”

(Adigun Olododo, 64, Bale Agbe compound)

The use of traditional knowledge in built environment in Africa can never be under estimated; the arrangement, pattern and location of houses are all done as to ensure functionality, aesthetics and habitability as we have them in planning standards today. It is a taboo to build close to river bank or across erosion channels. They also make use of knowledge of weather to decide the size of windows and doors. Housing finance was never a problem as most of the houses constructed were through communal efforts and contributions from friends, relatives and in-laws. Even today most of these are veritable sources of housing finance in Africa due to stiff conditionality attached to formal financing of housing (Adeboye, 2009)

Social and Administrative Settings

“One main thing we grew up to know and still in operation today is the administrative setting of the community. We have “Bale” heads in each family and they are responsible for issuance of order, information and other members of the family report to them issues of concern. Above the family heads are the “Baales” who administer the district comprising of many families, the baales are the representatives of the districts making up the community in the Oba’s palace. Whatever happened in the district is reported to the king who is the overall ruler of our town”

(Shittu Aje, 78, Mayehun)

“In the area of maintaining law and order, we have our established arrangement; those who are suspected of a particular offence are summoned in the Oba’s palace. If found guilty, he/she has to serve punishment to serve as deterrent to others. For instance, before it was cancelled, whoever is guilty of stealing is subjected to “eeru kunkun” a punishment where the person, man or woman is made to dress in shorts and splashed with ashes all over the body, then made to move round the whole town during the day with children and adults singing and making jest of him or her. The wisdom behind this is to subject the person to humiliation so as to deter others from committing similar offence. But now it is abrogated”

(Bale Gbodo, 87, Gbodo)

“Socially, we are organized long before the “oyinbo” (white people) came. The youths have different groups just as the men and the women, festivals are organized and people enjoyed themselves. We used to celebrate Ogun, Sango and Egungun festivals, even though, Islam and Christianity have taken over some of them”

(Saka Agoro, Farmer, 71, Oke Ako)

It is also revealed that African people have firmly established themselves administratively and socially before the advent of colonialism. This is manifested in the use of many already in place traditional platform of administrations in most of their colonies. The indirect rule in the Northern Nigeria is suffice as an example. Also, as opined by Rodney (1972), the empires of Mali and Songhay in West Africa, Tshaka in Zululand, Mossi to the East of Mali and the kingdom of Dahomey in the central part of Africa were some of the most powerful in wealth, authority and territorial expansion fully in place before colonial contact with Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given these revelations about the traditional practices and indigenous knowledge domiciled with African people, most of which had tremendously helped and still doing where they are in operation in maintaining peace and order, it would not be out of place if some of them can be revived and sustained to help in contemporary planning and sustain development. To this end, the followings are hereby recommended.

1. The use of indigenous languages to teach in schools: All the wisdom, knowledge, norms and values of man are housed in his language, once the language is ambushed, then, these values are in jeopardy. African indigenous languages particularly most of Nigerian languages are on the verge of extinction. It is easier for camel to pass through the hole of needle than for most Nigerian children to speak their mother tongues. This development has not only led to their poor academic performance but shielded them from the values and traditions of the land.
2. Promotion of art and culture: Huge investment should be encouraged on the promotion of cultural events. Apart from using such avenues for the revival of values and traditions, they can also serve as sources of employment for those who might find them interesting as means of livelihood. For instance, folklores and poetry in indigenous languages are now marketed internationally by renowned scholars across the country.
3. Change of attitude: If African renaissance as being campaigned for has to be firmly established, inferiority complex has to be smashed. Indigenous traditions, products and ideas must be given the same attention as accorded foreign ideologies. Some of the good values and practices, if not promoted will continue to remain barbaric, fetish and condemned. We must promote these values if they must be recognized.
4. Inventorying and Documentation: Most of indigenous knowledge and practices are not documented and the break of link between the custodians (old) and (new) generation as a result of contact with imperialism has done more havoc by robbing us of most of them. The remaining ones can only be gotten on oral account. There is therefore the urgent need to take inventory and document them properly.

5. Staging of experimental and demonstration programmes: Traditional practices and indigenous knowledge found to be of high standard can be staged in international platform to attract audience and recognition. This will enhance cross fertilization of values and tradition considered to be of high standard. And again, be of better instrument in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while the study has not entirely condemned the western styles of life, it calls for the cross fertilization of culture and tradition to achieve sustainable development, particularly at this period when the world is tilting towards sustainability. There is therefore the need to revive and promote indigenous languages and tradition. Traditional practices are far from being fetish as painted by the whites, many of them have been found out to help develop and still developing African people economically, socially and administratively. It was also established from the study that it was indeed the advent of colonialism that robbed Africa most of these values and tradition in the name of superiority and exploitation. The study therefore makes some policy guidelines which if religiously followed, are capable of bringing back the lost glory of African race and so ensures sustainable development.

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