Cultural Policy in
Nigeria

IN THIS DOCUMENT...

- Introduction
- General Directions of Cultural Policy
- Administrative and Institutional Structures
  - Public or Semi-public Bodies
  - Non-governmental Cultural Institutions
- Instruments of Cultural Policy
  - Financing and Planning of Cultural Activities
  - Legislation
- Sectoral Policies
  - Cultural Heritage
  - Artistic and literary creation
  - Training of personnel for cultural action
- Cultural Industries
  - Publishing and Reading
  - Broadcasting
  - Film
- Cultural Development
  - Recent evolution of cultural life
- International Cultural Cooperation
- Addresses
- Sources
- How This Document Was Prepared

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the largest (923,768 km²) and geographically, socially and culturally most diversified African countries. It is the most populous country of Africa (the population estimated at 110 million in 1990), and potentially one of the richest. Richly endowed with human and natural resources, benefitting of a large internal market, Nigeria is, however, highly dependant on external economic sector, particularly oil revenues (93 per cent of exports in 1989). The domestic industry is import dependant. More then 60 per cent of population is employed in agriculture, which provides the bulk of Nigeria's food and raw materials supply and non-oil exports.
Rich resources, large internal market and human potentials did not prevent Nigeria from being a low income country with GDP per capita declining from about 1,000 US dollars in 1980 to about 250 dollars in 1990. The world oil crisis, poor agricultural development, and internal civil war are usually cited as the main reasons for such an economic decline.

Nigeria became independent in 1960. The post-independence history of the country has been dominated by ethnic and regional antagonisms, and the interplay between military and civilian rule. The military take-over of government in 1966, the civil war from 1967-1979, and the rule of military government from 1970 to 1979 alternated with the attempts to introduce civilian rule and democracy. The civilian rule was introduced in the period 1979-1983, when it was interrupted by military coup. The preparations to introduce the civilian rule again, promised to be set-up in October 1992, have so far included the formation of political parties to contest elections, and the local and state government elections in 1991.

Nigeria is in the process of socio-economic restructuring and adjustment. The over-all situation of the majority of people remains of utmost concern: the population growth is estimated at 3.2 per cent, the life expectancy stands at 51 years, and the male/female adult literacy is limited to 54/31 per cent. According to the Human Development Index, Nigeria ranks as 129th out of 160 countries. Re-instating civilian rule through participatory politics and general elections, scheduled for August 1992, is regarded to be of paramount importance for the future of the nation.

The federal administrative structure is reflected in establishment and functioning of 21 federal states. Upon the independence (1960) Nigeria had three states; it was split into 12 states in 1967, and in 19 states in 1975. The Nigerian federalism is based on the strong centralized administration in the federal state and army, and the parallel fragmentation of the country in small states which may symbolize the emancipation of Nigerian ethnic groups.

The ethnic diversity of Nigerian society is reflected in the fact that the country has over 250 identified ethnic groups. Three very large ethno-linguistic entities dominate: the Yoruba, the Ibo and the Hausa-Fulani in the North. The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Ibo, Kanuri, Tiv, Edo, Nupe, Ibibio and Ijaw groups account for almost 80 per cent of the population. The Muslims comprise more then 50 per cent of the population, Christians account for about 35 per cent, while the balance of the population are animists.

---

**General Directions of Cultural Policy**

The rights and various attempts of the people of Nigeria to develop their culture have been supported by both the civilian and military governments and have been given consideration in the Nigerian Constitution. However, neither the systematized cultural policy, nor the set of main aims of cultural policies within the states have not been presented. Some of the clearly set directions of cultural policies are:
- analysis and understanding of the Nigerian cultural life, cultural values and cultural needs and expectations of people;

- affirmation of the authentic cultural values and cultural heritage;

- building up of a national cultural identity and parallel affirmation of cultural identities of different ethnic groups;

- development of cultural infrastructure and introduction of new technologies in cultural activities;

- establishment of links between culture and education, as well as between education and different cultural industries, particularly mass media.

National cultural policy is generally regarded as an instrument of promotion of national identity and Nigerian unity, as well as of communication and cooperation among different Nigerian or African cultures, while the federal states' cultural policies stand for the affirmation and development of particular (ethnic) cultures.

---------------------

**Administrative and Institutional Structures**

**Public or Semi-public Bodies**

Ministry of Culture and Social Welfare has two departments responsible for administering and implementing cultural policies. The Federal Department of Culture is responsible for the formulation and execution of the national cultural policies, for the financing and promotion of all national cultural organizations and for international cultural relations. The National Council for Arts and Culture encourages and develops all aspects of Nigerian cultures and interacts with private or public organizations.

Other federal bodies partly involved in cultural life and policies are Ministry of Information and Ministry of Education.

Different cultural sectors are covered by the statutory bodies at the federal level, such as the following: National Commission for Museums and Monuments, National Library of Nigeria, Center for Black and African Arts and Civilization, National Gallery of Modern Art, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Nigerian Television Authority, Film Corporation of Nigeria.

The Federal Ministry of Culture and Social Welfare is in charge of cooperation and coordination among various bodies at the national, state and local government levels.

The promotion and development of culture is the exclusive responsibility of each Nigerian state, although the Federal Government finances and offers administrative support for culture to each
State or provincial authorities have all established State Art Councils set up by law. These art councils have the responsibility to develop, administer and promote state cultural policies.

**Non-governmental cultural institutions**

Cultural organizations at both federal and local levels, artistic associations, specialized institutions, agencies, etc., operate through registration with the authorities. Organized cultural centers usually function within the local communities or at the universities. They are self-organized and sometimes supported for specialized, particular activities only. Some may also operate as small private enterprises, which is the case of small performing groups, small publishers, etc.

**Instruments of Cultural Policy**

**Financing and planning of cultural activities**

Functioning of public and semi-public bodies dealing with culture, as well as the main inputs in cultural infrastructure such as building of museums, theaters, establishment of libraries etc. are mainly covered from the federal budget. This also stands for the organization of large events such as national or literary festivals organized by federal or state agencies of culture.

Planning of cultural activities or of the establishment of cultural infrastructure is linked to the budget provisions preparations. It hardly goes beyond an action or project planning. A general development plan of the country may provide for the construction of cultural infrastructure or for major cultural events. The project planning is restricted to either the local level, or, in the case of international cultural cooperation, fully complies with the provisions of the donor organization.

Spending for culture depends on the interests and possibilities of the large public, particularly in the case of pop music, smaller performing groups, artisans, etc.

**Legislation**

The Nigerian Constitution has the provisions regarding the rights of Nigerian people to develop and promote their cultures, and to apply their cultures as an instrument promoting national identity and unity.

The Legislative List of the Nigerian Constitution defines the mandate of the Federal government, as well as of the state and provincial authorities, in the field of culture. According to the List, each Nigerian State government has the exclusive responsibility for the promotion and development of local culture(s).

Acts of the National Assembly of Nigeria define the role and functioning of the specialized bodies dealing with culture.
Particular laws passed by the state or provincial authorities represent the statutory basis for the establishment of arts councils and the other local bodies.

---

**Sectoral Policies**

**Cultural Heritage**

Cultural heritage is widely recognized as the most important input in defining the national and ethnic cultures in Nigeria. Nigeria inherits great cultures of the Benin plateau, but also an impressive body of plastic, music and literary arts. All Nigerian governments, notwithstanding their political backgrounds and developmental orientations, proclaimed their intention to preserve cultural heritage and allow for its full recognition. The National Archives, the National Museum, the National Library and all the existing universities have taken over the task to work on research, restoration and preservation of the cultural heritage. Both federal and a few state agencies working in this field are fully supported from the federal funds.

Although a lot of work has been done in research, systematization and preservation of cultural heritage. There is a need for well established documentation on cultural heritage, as well as a need for a well organized service for its restoration and preservation.

**Artistic and literary creation**

Artistic and literary creation depends mostly on the individual initiatives or on the local support. The federal Fund for the Assistance to Arts and Drama offers assistance to artists in the provision of fellowships, study grants for travels and purchase of the needed materials. Other types of support available to artists or writers depend on cultural industries that are directly involved or influence artistic and literary creation.

Performing arts are to a certain extent supported through investments in cultural infrastructure, such as building of theaters, stadiums hosting large festivals, etc.

**Training of personnel for cultural action**

Nigeria is among the countries which have training capacities and could organize either formal (university) or informal training for cultural action. The needs are large, but the curricula and programmes are not very well adapted to meet them.

University courses, apart from those designed to train journalists, are not specialized enough to prepare students for work in either cultural industries or as organizers of cultural activities. Specialists at higher level are usually trained on the job, and often also in the specialized institutions abroad.
Informal training carried on through seminars, workshops *etc.* is usually organized in accordance with the pressing needs for specialized personnel.

---

**Cultural Industries**

Cultural industries develop either as a state monopoly (*i.e.*, television broadcasting), as public, or as private industries. The ownership structure is clearly reflected in the development of cultural industries.

**Publishing and Reading**

Publishing and reading are estimated to be underdeveloped in Nigeria. The first printing outfit was established in Calabar in 1846. Newspapers, political and religious literature constituted the bulk of publishing activity in Nigeria for nearly a century. It is estimated that Nigeria now has over 500 publishers and there are about 50 registered member-firms in the Nigerian Publishers Association. They are expected to serve about half a million of Nigerian students and general public.

Inconsistent fiscal and education policies in Nigeria and the heavy dependence on government patronage were not in favour of improving rather weak publishing infrastructures. However, the publishing industry relies mostly on the enormous needs for school books and teaching materials. Over 95 per cent of books used in the primary and junior secondary schools are locally printed (and written, edited and illustrated by the Nigerians). Nigerian publishers are now going into the senior secondary school sector and into the technical, professional and tertiary sectors of textbook production. The estimates made in the mid-eighties showed that a minimum of 285 million textbooks per annum at all levels of education would be needed.

The main problems encountered by the publishing industry are the following: printing equipment is rather obsolete and scarce; there are constant shortages of paper; the publishing personnel is not always well trained. The linguistic problem is also important, as most indigenous languages do not have developed orthographies. The inconsistent educational policies, unreliable authorities supposed to support some publishers, piracy and poor promotion and distribution are also mentioned as problems.

Large internal markets and ever greater needs linked to the fast spreading education and reading culture support strongly the development of publishing industry.

**Broadcasting**

Mass media/radio and television broadcasting industries have been spreading very tastly, motivated by 2 main factors: politics and education. Technical and technological reasons should be added as these enabled a very fast proliferation of radio and TV stations in Nigeria during the last about thirty years.
TV transmission began in Western Nigeria in 1559, and a year later the Eastern Nigeria TV Service and Radio TV Kaduna Service were established. The Federal government established the Nigerian Television Service (NTS) in Lagos in 1962. The development of television broadcasting reflected the regional versus federal politics and aspirations. Each of the 21 Nigerian states opted for its own radio and TV station, as well as for university, colleges, hospitals, etc. 34 TV stations had been established in Nigeria over 25 years, at a rate of 1.5 station a year. Nigeria has the fourth largest TV network in the world, with the constantly growing staff and the figure of imported programmes going constantly down. There is an ever increased choice of TV channels, and the oil revenues helped to increase the number of TV sets. In the mid-seventies about 87 per cent of population had access to TV programmes.

Educational television began broadcasting to schools in 1959 and soon became a very important input in development of TV. The merits of TV for the development of education in Nigeria are also enormous both in the processes of formal and informal education.

There were efforts to coordinate the growth of TV. The military government introduced in 1976 the Nigerian TV authority - NTA that took over the 10 then existing TV stations and created 9 more. However, in 1979 the Constitution gave the Nigerian president the mandate to allow state governments, organizations and individuals to establish and operate TV stations. In 1984 the military government nationalized all TV stations and established a state monopoly over television broadcasting. Proliferation of TV and radio stations proved to be a very powerful means for the emancipation of ethnic cultures and values.

**Film**

Film production seems to be the least developed among the Nigerian mass communications industries. The local production of films is not encouraged neither financially nor through some cultural policy. The poor distribution networks operated mostly by strangers and dependent on Indian and American production do not support the production of domestic films. The state censorship also prevents production and distribution of domestic films. Some authors claim that the restructuring of the film industry through the nationalization of film production and distribution would be welcome. The need to set up laboratories and train professionals is also emphasized.

**Cultural Development**

Neither in the sphere of economics, nor in the sphere of politics, Nigerian authorities and Nigerian intellectuals have never denied culture a very important role. The need to integrate cultural activities and values in all spheres of life has been very loudly pronounced in the post-independence development of Nigeria. General ideas on Nigerian development were linked to the authentic cultural values.

However, the clash between modernization (westernization) on one, and the traditional cultural values on the other side could not have been avoided. The traditional cultures have been more or
less left to the local initiatives. In the context of rather radical developmental changes, they have generated different types of pop-cultures: pop-music based on the strong authentic traditions; pop-literature (market literature) produced for the barely literate audience and expressing the general popular concerns; performing arts and groups inheriting the status of traditional performers (like for instance popular theater performances by more than 100 Yoruba professional popular ambulant groups), etc. Cultural industries and new technologies have very much influenced such developments by enabling fast communication and creation of internal (music, literature, etc.) markets.

The most important issue of cultural development is certainly the issue of creation of either national Nigerian, or affirmation of ethnic cultural identity. This is also an important political issue, as the Nigerian federalism tried to put together the achievements of the modern democratic West European state and the local cultural traditions. The whole process of restructuration and adjustment is in fact the process of defining the identity of Nigerian peoples and individuals.

Development of education, establishment and growth of cultural institutions and cultural industries all reflect the constant processes of change in Nigerian life and Nigerian cultures. It is impossible to quantify these processes, but it is evident even now that the cultural growth is reflected in the new type of Nigerian culture and identity. It is not based on the merging of different cultural traditions, but it implies a certain selection of values that would define a modern cultural identity of Nigeria.

Recent evolution of cultural life

The local cultural milieu of Nigeria is extremely diversified, and depends not only on the ethnic cultural values and habits, but also on religious habits and obligations. There are also major differences between rural and urban cultural life, and rural and urban habits and norms.

Generally speaking, the cultural life in Nigeria is to the large extent marked by tradition, and traditional forms of cultural events are most popular: festivals, exhibitions, performing, playing music and dancing in the open. This can be illustrated by citing the actions planned to be implemented in cooperation with UNESCO: National Festival of Children's Toys, Rhymes and Games; or, National Exhibition of the Craftsmanship of the Nigerian People; or, Developing Educational Activities for Children and the Youth in Nigerian Museums, etc.

On the other side, the cultural life is very much influenced, and defined, by the cultural industries, particularly mass media. Cultural industries bring into the Nigerian cultural life new civilizational and technological standards that are easily accepted by the majority of population.

The recent evolution of cultural life in Nigeria is thus strongly marked by the traditional and religious habits, and by mass media and easily spreading cultural industries.

---

International Cultural Cooperation
Cultural cooperation of Nigeria is carried on the basis of the signed agreements, either bilateral or multilateral. The coordinating agency for cultural cooperation is the Federal Department of Culture.

Regional African cooperation is mostly based on the common developmental experience and some similar characteristics of African cultures. It is motivated by the need to work on the emancipation of African cultures. The Black African arts and civilizations try to establish mutual links and exchange, which is not very easy as the authentic values and types of communication do not normally bring them closely together. Pan-African festivals offer an occasion for over-all presentation of arts and crafts, and the Nigerian government has hosted such manifestations (e.g. in 1977.).

Cooperation with western countries is mostly based on the presentation of Nigerian arts and crafts, or Nigerian music to the western audiences, and on the transfer of knowledge on cultural institutions and activities from the West. Nigerian cultures are very much in contact with the western cultural production and mass media, while the information on Nigerian cultures are very scarce in the West. The balance can hardly be reached.

The Nigerian government backs the cultural exchange through exchange of artists, exhibitions, information materials, etc. on the reciprocal basis.

Cooperation with UN, and particularly UNESCO, is of special concern. Apart from the support for festivals, exhibitions, etc., UNESCO pays particular attention to relevant cultural issues, such as copyright information management and enforcement, collection, analysis and documentation of the oral traditions, restoration and conservation of national monuments, creative writing, education, training in cultural development, establishment of a specialized National Institute for Cultural Orientation, etc. It is also through this organization that the Nigerian cultural institutions or associations join specialized international associations and organizations.

Addresses

Federal Ministry of Information
(Cultural Division)
National Theatre, Iganmu
P.M.B. 12524
Lagos

Historical Society of Nigeria
Dept. of History
University of Lagos
Lagos

Ministry of Culture and Social Welfare
Kofo Aboyomi St.
Victoria Island
Lagos

National Commission for Museums and Monuments
National Museum
Onikan Rd
Lagos

National Council for Arts and Culture
Inagmu PMB 12524
Lagos

National Library of Nigeria
4 Wesley St.
PMB 12626
Lagos
Tel. 63-47-04

National Museum
PMB 2127
Kaduna

National Museum
Onikan Rd
Lagos

Nigeria Educational Research Council
POB 8058
Lagos

Nigerian Institute of Architects
POB 178
2 Idowu Taylor St. Victoria Island
Lagos
Tel. 617940

Nigerian Institute of International Affairs
Koto Abayomi Rd
Victoria Island
POB 1727
Lagos
Tel. 615606-10
Telex 22638

Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research
PMB 5, University of Ibadan
Sources


© copyright The Institute for Cultural Democracy 1995, 1998