What Role Does Culture Play In Development?

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Culture as a Source of Progress

"Culture is the fountain of our progress and creativity and must be carefully nurtured to grow and develop." *World Commission on Culture and Development*

Cultural Identity and Quality of Life

Undoubtedly, the quality of our lives depends on the extent to which we can benefit from our culture. Maintaining a connection with our homeland, our language, music, and art plays a critical role in giving meaning to our lives. Not only that, but culture is essential for our mental well-being as well. Culture plays a very important role not only in an individual's life but also in the development of society. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development 2012 lists culture as an integral part of development. However, the question arises: what role does culture play in development?

Meaning of Human Development

Before discussing the role of culture in development, it is important to discuss what we mean by development. Development, simply defined, means the progress of human life and welfare. Moreover, it means making the best of economic, social, political, and societal opportunities. Development should not be at the expense of the marginalized. Development means equal opportunities for all without compromising the needs of future generations and marginalized groups (Tubadji et al., 2015).

South Korea as a Development Example

Now, let us discuss the role of culture in development. South Korea is the 8th largest country in terms of exports. It has the 11th largest economy in the world. It has an average life expectancy of 89 years. The unemployment rate was at a meager 2.90 percent in 2015. It ranks 4th in research and development. However, it was not always the case. In the 1960s, South Korea fared much worse than several sub-Saharan countries. There was not much difference between Ghana and South Korea in

terms of economy and development. Today, the difference is clearly visible.

Work Ethic Education and Economic Success

According to various social scientists, culture played a defining role in the development of South Korea. South Korea has a culture where hard work is valued above everything else. They promoted thriftiness and loyalty to work. Moreover, they invested heavily in education and discipline, both of which derive their importance from the South Korean culture. As a result, South Korea moved away from foreign aid and began developing local industries. The investment in education translated into expert knowledge, leading to many tech giants sprouting up in South Korea. A case in point is Samsung. Education and discipline have also led to the development of robust political and monetary institutions, which have played a major role in South Korea's development.

Culture and the Millennium Development Goals

The importance of culture is also underlined in the attainment of development goals. The Millennium Development Goals are emphasized in the documents. Culture promotes economic growth, as highlighted in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. A report was published in which the UN highlighted how new areas of economic growth are emerging. The business areas identified are cultural heritage, architecture, marketing, and music. These areas are closely associated with culture, which shows how culture is a new means of development and economic and social growth.

Political Economic and Cultural Relationships

Moreover, culture has a close association with politics. This close association of culture with politics and economics makes culture a very important tool for development. Culture is responsible for shaping identity. Identity helps build a strong individual, which in turn builds a strong nation. Therefore, culture is critical for nation-building. Moreover, it is critical during times of war and peace. During times of peace, culture promotes stability. Stability is critical for development, as shown in the examples of South Korea and North Korea. South Korea experienced tremendous growth due to its stability. On the other hand, North Korea, due to its instability, is still lagging far behind on all social and economic indicators. It shows that culture can have a negative effect on development as well.

Afghanistan and Traditional Social Structures

Let us consider the example of Afghanistan, where tribes continue to dominate the society to this day. Afghan society is still primitive in relation to other nations. Their culture reflects a strong affinity with tribal values. It has had a debilitating effect on nation-building in Afghanistan. Due to this close

affinity to tribal values, Afghanistan has not enjoyed the same economic and social development as other nations have over the years. Instead, Afghan culture has a negative effect on development in Afghanistan.

North Korea and Authoritarian Culture

Similarly, North Korea's culture has had the same effect as in the case of Afghanistan. North Korea is dominated by a dictator who demands absolute loyalty through coercion and the use of state institutions. There is no rule of law, only the rule of Kim Jong-Un. Its culture demands a stronger allegiance to the ruler than to the motherland. The state of development in North Korea is well known to the world.

Conclusion on Culture and Development

Culture is a powerful tool in terms of development. Culture and development go hand in hand. However, the presence of strong cultural values does not necessarily translate into development. Culture has both negative and positive effects, as the examples of South and North Korea highlight (De Beukelaer et al., 2015).

References

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