



**FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY  
MINNA**

**CULTURAL INFORMATION:  
A GATEWAY TO SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

*By*

**PROF. (MRS.) JULIANA NKECHI UDENSI**  
*B.Ed. (ABU), MLS (UI), PhD (UNN), NLA, LRCN*  
*Professor of Library and Information Technology*

**INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES 55**

**12<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2017**



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## Preamble

My inaugural lecture today is like a debt payment since it is the culture of the University that when you are promoted to the rank of a Professor you present your inaugural lecture. This inaugural is very special being the first in the Department of Library and Information Technology. It is also an avenue to present my research findings in a very important aspect of education and information management that has often been neglected over the years - the **Africana**.

### Explanation of some Major Terms

It is important that some major terms mentioned in the title be explained along with other terms that will be used in this inaugural lecture. These terms include culture, information, sustainable development, Africana, information professional, etc.

#### 1.0 Culture

The word 'culture' was first used by the pioneer English Anthropologist, Edward B. Tylor in his book, *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871. Tylor defined culture as "that complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society.

A catalogue of definitions of culture as outlined by Li and Karakowsky (2001) are as follows:

- Culture is the systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people. Culture is communication, communication is culture. Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated behavior; that is the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted, or more briefly; behavior acquired*

through social learning. Culture is symbolic to communication. Some of its symbols include a group's skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, and motives. The meanings of the symbols are learned and deliberately perpetuated in a society through its institutions. Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols; constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action. Culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. Culture is not about dancing because it is not limited to music; it is not about costume alone. It is beyond pattern of social celebration, rituals pertaining to birth and marriage, cuisine or sport. Culture is about people's total way of life; the way people live, eat, worship, produce, create and recreate. It is the totality of a set of bequeathed ideas, belief system, values and norms, which constitute the common bases of generally agreed social action.

Charles A. Ellwood, an American also tried to capture the various meanings of culture thus:

*Culture is a collective name for all behavioral patterns socially acquired and transmitted by means of symbols; hence a name for distinctive achievements of human groups, including not only such items as language, tool making, industry, art, science, law, government, morals and religion, but also the material instruments or artefacts in which cultural achievements are embodied and by which intellectual cultural features are given*

*practical effect; such as buildings, tools, machines, communication devices, art objects, etc. The essential part of culture is to be found in the patterns embodied in the social traditions of a group, that is, in knowledge, ideas, beliefs, values, standards, and sentiments prevalent in the group. The overt part of culture is to be found in the actual behavior of the group, usually in its usages, customs, and institutions.... (Cited in Amponsah, 2010).*

Culture can therefore be summed up to be the collectivity of human activities and general principles that tend to guide ideas of a group of people with shared traditions (with general acceptability), which are passed on, instilled into generations and reinvigorated or sustained by members of the group.

The continent of Africa is indeed so rich and diverse in its culture that at the background of every African is her culture and these African cultural practices have experienced decline in recent times.

Before 1950, not much was documented on the African rich culture because publications on Africa were controlled and directed from outside the continent, (Fyfe, 1950). As at 1959, the number of African authors could be counted in units. The publications that existed in the monasteries at Ethiopia and Eritrea were limited to religious and affiliated political activities, (Harlan and Arbor, 2006). When the white man initially came to Africa in the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was not for diplomatic or cultural reasons but to facilitate the slave trade in Africa. Their publications therefore centered on social anthropology which was their major interest.

In fact there was need for Africans to awake to the responsibility of contributing more to the few writings on ground on the

continent. Afigbo (1990) narrated how he visited some universities in the United Kingdom. He was not satisfied with what he observed and therefore declared his observations in the following statements; '...the study of Africa is thus a responsibility which Africa must recognize lies completely on their shoulders. They may receive help and encouragement from outside-Europe, but they must face the overall responsibility. This imposes on the African an awesome responsibility in the preservation of the African culture'.

He also observed that there were very few copies of documentaries on African works in the universities he visited in the United States of America and this was attributed to low patronage of African works in the university libraries overseas and back home only very few university libraries kept them. He warned that Africa will lose her unique cultural features through the intrusion of modern uses and behaviors alien to her values if African culture is not utilized and preserved. It looks to me that his warning was a prophecy that has come to fulfilment today.

It is therefore likely that the African continent will definitely lose her cultural heritage if she does not rise to preserve the unique cultural features that set her apart. Any society without culture obviously has no identity. Culture is by its essence, the foundation on which all societies are built and as such the foundation of any prevailing social order. It is therefore advised that an understanding of Africa's cultural heritage be part of the quest for a sense of African identity. But if cultural artifacts are not preserved, how then can these rudiments be transferred to future generations. This indeed, is worrisome.

One-time President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda stated that it is important for African national identity to be preserved, for it is their presence that gives each country a cultural soul and



individuality. The preservation of a nation's heritage is necessary to the life of men and women for whom they represent a powerful, physical, moral and spiritual regenerating influence. The documentation and preservation of our national identity (our culture) therefore is the first step towards regaining the nation's creative and inventive abilities. As Mushlin (1998) rightly summarized, in one of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conferences in Washington D.C, thus: Common history, language, religion, custom and geography, as well as literature, music and visual arts create special characteristics of a people and this identity must be understood, respected and preserved. The unique traditional culture of a country is amongst the important components necessary for its social development and this heritage must serve prominently as the essential foundation for modernity and innovation.

Culture is therefore the bedrock on which the development of a country is built; it can therefore not be ignored and if it cannot be ignored then it must be documented and preserved both for the present and future generations. By this, Sir, the role of the library and information professionals as information custodians, disseminators and conservators is grounded in terms of the actualization of the above professional objective. The question is, 'whether the conservation and the preservation of our rich African culture is gradually eluding us as information professionals'.

### **1.1 Cultural Information and Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. The desirable end result is a state of society where living

conditions and resource continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural systems. If culture is who we are and what shapes our identity, then, no development can be sustainable without culture.

**1.1.1 UNESCO** on “Culture for Sustainable Development” reported in September 2015 that the United Nations General Assembly adopted the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, with 17 ambitious universal goals to transform our world; culture was the central focus for the 2030 transformation. **UNESCO** ensures that the role of culture is recognized through majority of the Sustainable Development Goals; including those focusing on quality education, sustainable environment, sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production patterns, peaceful and inclusive societies, gender equality, food security, etc.

Culture is both an enabler and a driver of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. It is indeed worthy of note that **UNESCO's** objective of promoting cultural diversity and organizing Cultural Conventions to this effect are indeed keys to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. If culture stands out as the key to sustainability of any sector; then the acquisition, documentation, preservation and dissemination of the African culture in our libraries is therefore a task that must be done.

### **1.1.2 Information**

Many people have various understandings of the term 'information'. Some might simply refer to it as data that is meaningfully transmitted to different avenues or to different people and group of people or organizations for various purposes or reasons.

