

CULTURE, RECONSTRUCTION AND RESETTLEMENT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN MAINOK, KAGA, BORNO STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

As a result of violent attacks by Boko Haram Insurgents, several communities in Northeast Nigeria have been conquered leading to considerable loss of life and property with surviving inhabitants left with no other option than to flee their habitats for safety. Following the recent “defeat” of the insurgents and liberation of some communities, efforts are being made by the government at both state and federal levels in collaboration with NGOs to resettle the IDPs back to their communities. This paper explores Borno State government’s resettlement and reconstruction process; using the reconstructed houses for IDPs in Mainok, Kaga LGA as a case study to find out if culture is a requisite criterion integrated in the process as it plays a vital role in sustainable development. The study employs qualitative methodology and the results of the research acquired through in-depth interviews with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the housing project, Village Heads of Mainok I and II and a Director in the Borno state ministry of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement point to the fact that cultural considerations are lacking in the reconstruction and resettlement plan and policy of the IDPs by the Borno State Government. Recommendations are made that the international community and the national authorities may find useful while implementing future programs.

Key Words: Culture, Reconstruction, Resettlement, Displaced, Persons

Introduction

As the bedrock of a society, it is apparent that culture matters to sustainable development; yet almost 30 years after the Brundtland report ‘Our Common Future’ the incorporation of culture into sustainability debates seems to remain a great challenge, both scientifically and politically (Dessein, Soini, Fairclough & Horlings, 2005). The above assertion is confirmed in the observation made by UNESCO consultants Géraldine Chatelard and Hanan Kassab Hassan who carried out a survey on Syrian refugees. In their Survey report titled *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Displaced Syrians* which posits that mainstream humanitarian organisations do not incorporate culture as part of their assessments of disasters, emergencies, or displaced persons and refugee needs. Culture and cultural heritage are also not part of their programmatic agendas, nor of their advocacy efforts for refugee rights. On the 25th of November 2016, a web search was carried out on the UN High Commissioner for Refugees’ (UNHCR) web-portal, which retrieved 11,481 documents produced by the organisation and its humanitarian partners on the Syria Regional Refugee Response. These reports revealed that only two dozen items mentioned the words ‘culture’ and ‘cultural’. They almost exclusively concerned cultural norms within the framework of psychological interventions, such as those focusing on mental health, early marriage, or sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Other initiatives exist, but they lack visibility, traction, sustainability and, most probably, broad and long-term impact (Chatelard and Hassan, 2017). UNESCO in its 2003 convention recognised that communities, groups and individuals are the stewards in defining their heritage, identifying threats, and deciding how to address them. Against this premise, it is apparent that any programme targeted at improving the lives of a community requires the involvement of the people from planning to implementation in order to be impactful. (Chatelard and Hassan, 2017). This approach is known as the bottom-top approach-an approach based on the people’s needs and aspirations, grounded on their cultural orientation or background. For a paper that highlights the role of culture in community development, it is vital to begin by understanding the term culture.

Culture: Culture is generally understood as the total way of life of a group of people which sums up their experience in their environment. It comprises all learned behaviours such as skills, attitudes, languages values and the particular material items used within a defined space or environment. This entails that every individual within a society learns how to express his needs and thoughts in a way that other members of the society can understand and accept (El- yakub, 2009). Culture varies from society to society, which implies that every society has its own unique culture.

The famous anthropologist Taylor (1871), defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. Keesing (1981), stresses the ideational aspect of culture thus; that cultures are comprised of “systems of shared ideas, systems of concepts and rules and meanings that underlie and are expressed in the ways that human beings live” (Keesing, 1981).

Helman (1994), gives a useful summary to the two definitions mentioned above thus;

From these definitions one can see that culture is a set of guidelines (both explicit and implicit) which individuals inherit as members of a particular society, and which tells them how to view the world, how to experience it emotionally, and how to behave in it in relation to other people, to supernatural forces or gods, and to the natural environment. It also provides them with a way of transmitting these guidelines to the next generation – by the use of symbols, language, art and ritual. To some extent culture can be seen as an inherited ‘lens’ through which the individual perceives and understands the world that he inhabits and learns how to live within it. Growing up within any society is a form of enculturation whereby the individual slowly acquires the cultural ‘lens’ of that society. Without such a shared perception of the world, both the cohesion and continuity of any human group is impossible. (Pp. 2-3)

The above summary of definitions on culture stresses on an individual’s sense of belonging to a particular group, environment, and specific period (generation), as well as enculturation and acquisition of the cultural lens by individuals.

Reconstruction: The orientation of the term reconstruction in this context refers to the rebuilding of destroyed architectural structures such as houses and government buildings that have been destroyed either partially or completely during violent attacks by insurgents.

Resettlement: Resettlement refers to the return of displaced people back to their original geographical communities.

Development/Community Development: The concept of development has several different and opposing definitions which are based on the interests of different groups and each group defines development in a way that benefits its agenda (Mchombu, 2004). However, the definition by Waweru (2015) appears most suitable to this paper. The term development implies improvement of social, political, economic, infrastructural and physical conditions in a community. Community development is therefore, a process for enhancing the wellbeing of the members of a given community through the improvement of social, political, economic, structural and infrastructural conditions in that community.

As essential as culture is to sustainable development, its incorporation into development plans, policy and implementation still remains a great challenge especially on the part of the government. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the reconstruction and resettlement process of the IDPs of Mainok, Kaga LGA by the Borno state government to establish if culture is a requisite criterion in the plan, policy implementation and investigates if the project was carried out in accordance to the basic principles of community development such community participation, empowerment, lifelong learning, inclusion, access and equity, social action, advocacy, networking and self-help as outlined by the Melbourne based Association of Neighborhood Houses and Learning Centres (2013).

Background

Kaga is one of the 27 local government areas of Borno State with its Headquarters in Beneshiek. It has a population of 90,015 people (Christian Aid, 2016). Located along Maiduguri Damaturu road, Kaga is one of the worse hit LGAs in Borno State. Mainok is a famous village in Kaga. The village has experienced repeated attacks, gruesome killings and wanton destruction of houses and property by the insurgents (Christian Aid, 2016).

Most of Kaga IDPs reside both in spontaneous settlement/informal camps with host families within the LGA mostly in Beneshiek the LGA’s capital. The Borno state government in early 2017 constructed houses for the IDPs in Kaga as part of it’s efforts to facilitate the return of the IDP’s to their communities. The newly constructed houses for the IDPs in Kaga were constructed in Tamsu Kawu, Mainta Kururi and Mainok.

Community Resettlement, Reconstruction and Development in Mainok

Following the ‘defeat’ of the insurgents in some parts of the Northeast, the Borno state government in collaboration with other governmental and non-governmental organizations have started returning IDPs back to their communities. The Ministry of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement also known as the triple R ministry has been central in facilitating the return of these IDPs to their liberated communities especially in the local government headquarters however, return to the hinterlands is at a very low

percentage as most of such areas have not yet been declared safe. Kaga local government area is one of the LGAs that has witnessed a significant and safe return of its IDPs.

The return of IDPs after violent conflicts, requires several developmental projects to improve the living conditions of the displaced persons who have lost both loved ones and property and are inclusively traumatized. This entails the reconstruction and reestablishment of structure and infrastructure as well as provision of diverse means of livelihood and access to basic amenities such as water, food, health, and education. In Mainok village, 100 houses have been reconstructed (50 on each side of the main highway) and distributed to the IDPs that were temporarily settled in camps in Beneshiek, the local government headquarter as part of the return process. The excerpt below is a report captured by Channels Television during a supervision visit to the project site of the housing unit for IDPs in Kaga LGA by some government officials and some officials of the UNDP which has partnered with the Borno State government on the resettlement and reconstruction project. Mr Wasaram (2017) states:

Succor has come the way of returning Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Kaga Local Government of Borno State, as about 192 families will soon take ownership of the newly reconstructed houses in the area.

The reconstruction project in Kaga is a pilot of the rebuilding project in affected communities within Borno, and the state government has set March 6 as the official date for allocation. The development is part of the process of rebuilding Nigeria's Northeast, after some states including Borno suffered unquantifiable loss as the ruthless Boko Haram unleashed terror on the states. To achieve the humanitarian gesture, the Borno State Government got a seamless collaboration of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Japanese Government. Kaga is the first beneficiary community owing to the return of calm and the absence of security threat to the civilian population in the area. The project covers the reconstruction of municipal buildings, schools and most importantly homes of the affected population. Officials say the rebuilding has paved way for villagers to have even better homes than they had before the crisis. According to the Chairman of Kaga Local Government, Lawan Wasaram, the beneficiaries are elated by the project, as they haven't had such luxury in a long time. "They are happy; a villager who has not slept under a concrete building before and now he has sheets and concrete building, of course they are happy. "Even when the rains come they are no longer worried. Their lives have changed from living in a village to a city" (Excerpt from channels Television, February 2017 <https://www.channelstv.com/2017/02/13/rebuilding-borno-192-families-to-get-new-homes-in-kaga/>).

Is the above excerpt a true reflection of the people's perception and feelings? This question is informed by the fact that the newly constructed houses are indeed totally contrary to what was in existence before the destruction and displacement. Kanuri settlements vary in size; but most contain walled-in compounds surrounding several mud or grass houses with thatched, cone-shaped roofs. These houses are very cool during the hot months. Farmlands surround each settlement (Joshua Project, 2018). Kanuri people shape their environment to serve the requirements of their tradition which is both culturally and religiously inspired. Due to the dry weather with intense sunshine, Kanuri people build high walls round the courtyard to provide large shaded areas which in turn reduce intense radiation from the sun. The people also settle in large groups for instance, members of an extended family live within the same neighborhood. This allows communalism and fosters unity. Communal eating is also a central feature of a typical Kanuri setting. Large congregation to celebrate weddings, child naming ceremonies or to mourn the dead explains the provision of large spaces within the compound. Islamic religion also influences this unity and interactions through the concept of congregational prayers. For the five daily prayers, one is opportune to meet the generality of family heads in the neighborhood, Friday congregational prayers extends the interaction to about five miles radius. Eid congregational prayer affords such interaction with family heads of the whole town or group of villages (Ibrahim, 2018).

Separation between males and females as dictated by Islam is clearly depicted in a typical Kanuri setting which dictates the arrangement of the family house. Several rooms are built around the court yard. The inner rooms are for the women which is often restricted while the outer ones are for the males which also includes a visitors' reception area. The structure of a typical Kanuri family home consists of the family head, his brothers, his children, his wives, his parents and other relatives. The male children may choose to

start their matrimonial homes within the same compound before setting up their own nucleus if they so wish.

Key Findings

The findings of this work are presented in four segments- those of the government, the village heads, the beneficiaries of the housing project and the non- beneficiaries.

Government Respondent

Government respondent from the RRR ministry revealed that the housing project in Mainok was based on a prescriptive approach lacking cultural considerations and community involvement. The respondent said “those mud and thatch structures are not part of the people’s culture rather they are reflections of poverty. The people need to come out of their shambles and they also need decent lives therefore, the government of the day constructed modern houses for the IDPs to improve their standard of living. The beneficiaries were very happy about the development and expressed gratitude to the government for the effort”. The respondent however, added that the only thing lacking in the newly constructed houses is the open space. The respondent also revealed that, a census was carried out to find out the actual number of houses destroyed and the real owners which informed the distribution. “We carried out a census of the number of houses destroyed, identified the actual owners and built the houses accordingly but this time, ownership of those houses was given to both man and wife instead of the family head which was usually the man”. This contradicts the original makeup of the Kanuri society which is patriarchal in nature. Asking about cases of polygamy, the respondent mentioned the cases were few and negligible. One finds this statement unconvincing as polygamy is dominant within Kanuri culture however, one cannot deny cases of monogamy

It was observed that the Triple R ministry has no written policy guiding the resettlement process. The respondent said “the ministry has no written working policy on ground. This is because the ministry is new and we are not experienced when it comes to the displacement and resettlement of IDPs. We are responding to an emergency. The whole process is new and we are still learning. We only come up with project proposals which is presented to the state house of assembly. If approved, we go ahead to implement”.

The respondents mentioned the following as the main factors they consider in the resettlement process:

1. Safety,
2. Provision of basic amenities and services such as Water, Food, Shelter, Health and Education,
3. Provision of means of livelihood for the people. They return with packages to fend for themselves. In instances where houses could not be built for the returning IDPs, building materials are given to the IDPs such as cement, block, zinc and cash to help with labor.

The respondents emphasized that the return process is informed by the security situation which has to be declared safe by the military before the return is initiated. The respondent disclosed that the government concentrates more on the reconstruction of government public buildings.

Apart from the fact that this project was prescriptive in nature thus, giving no special or specific consideration for culture which is a vital element, it was also observed that it was not executed along the principles of community development as outlined by the Melbourne based Association of Neighborhood Houses and Learning Centres (ANHLC) which are: community participation, empowerment, lifelong learning, inclusion, access and equity, social action, advocacy, networking and self-help.

All the data collected from the government respondent do not tally with the principles of community development and are contrary to the ideas of sustainable development as provided by the Brundtland (1987) report titled: *Our Common Future*.

Village Heads

The village heads of Mainok I and II revealed that they were informed by the government of the initiative and it stopped at that. They were not consulted on their preference of the architectural style or design and they were not involved in the distribution. They stated that that the houses are 96 in number and over 3,000 houses were destroyed hence, it is impossible to reach every victim. They appreciated government effort and mentioned that it will be good for the government to do more. This finding clearly points to the fact that the principles of community development applied were not worthy of mention. Here are the principles of Community Participation, Community Ownership and Inclusion.

Project Beneficiaries

On the part of the beneficiaries, a few contradictions were observed from the information disclosed by the government respondents and the beneficiaries of the project. All respondents mentioned they were not aware of any census conducted prior to the commencement of the building and distribution was not done based on previous property ownership rather the houses were allocated to lucky ones and that ownership was not given to both men and women.

It was observed that, the houses were newly constructed and not reconstructions. They encompassed two rooms, a sitting room, a kitchen and a toilet. All respondents mentioned the houses are too small for their large families. This confirms the author's initial assertion that the new constructions may not contain the traditional Kanuri family setting which is largely extended. They all mentioned that the new houses do not encourage togetherness and unity in line with their culture; which is centered on the practice of family congregational prayers and communal eating. A female respondent mentioned "the open space is very small and does not allow for large interactions during ceremonies such as weddings, naming ceremonies and funerals".

All female respondents said the new houses do not give them enough privacy. One respondent said "no more privacy as we no longer have our restricted areas".

All beneficiaries expressed gratitude to the government for the provision of shelter just like the government respondent mentioned.

It is obvious from the above that, the newly constructed houses do not encourage continuous cultural practices and therefore, threaten cultural sustainability. The concept of cultural sustainability advocates for the preservation of cultural heritage.

Non Project Beneficiaries

The findings of the data collected from non-beneficiaries of the project is somewhat unsatisfactory.

All respondents revealed that they applied for the houses but were not given. Two respondents disclosed their farmlands were encroached on by the government without compensation either in form of a building or money. This claim should not be taken lightly as they have tendencies of steering fresh conflicts. Three respondents disclosed that the beneficiaries of the housing project are mostly resident in Maiduguri, the Borno state capital and have either given it out on rent or have given it to relatives to help watch over. This is another red flag as it indicates that the beneficiaries of this project are not even victims of the insurgency. One respondent disclosed that this initiative has created tension between the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries as the village is polarized between the "haves" and the "have nots". This is a serious threat to sustainable development as there is no sense of ownership and hence community members may do little or nothing to ensure the sustainability of this initiative.

All respondents denied being supported by government with building materials and cash to help with labour in the reconstruction of their destroyed houses. They revealed that the little renovation they were able to do came from their individual efforts. Observation of the town in general by the authors indicates that little renovations have been carried out by individuals to provide covering from rain, sun and extreme weather mostly using raffia mats, rubber mats and thatch.

Other respondents mentioned that God is the source of wealth and in due time, with or without the government, they will be able to build their own houses, hence, they hold no grudge against the beneficiaries of the project. They all made reference to the distribution in Tamsu kawu and Mainta Kururi saying those were fair and it will be nice if lessons can be learnt from those ones in the future.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government needs to involve the people in the planning and implementation of projects aimed at improving their quality of life. They know their problems, understand it better and should be the ones to proffer solutions to these problems or be allowed to play a significant part in the planning and actualizations of any solutions or programs proffered for their benefit. Developmental projects should not be forced if sustainability is the goal.
2. There is a need for the government to come up with a written policy to guide the resettlement process which should include culture as a major criterion.
3. It is agreed that culture is dynamic but changes should not be enforced. Kaga LGA is famous for the production of mud bricks by the bridge along the Damaturu-Maiduguri road. These bricks for instance can be baked and used in the construction of their houses to allow for cooler rooms which will help in period of searing temperatures which is typical to the region.
4. There is an urgent need for the enlightenment of stakeholders at all levels of government (Federal, State and Local), Governmental and Non-governmental organizations on culture and the vital role it plays in sustainable development.
5. Provision of the diverse means of livelihood for the returning IDPs should also be culturally inclusive. Here culture will serve as a driver for sustainable development using it as a capital. This will also promote cultural sustainability ensuring that cultural practices are neither lost or disregarded.

Conclusion

The culture of the Kanuri people promotes peaceful coexistence, unity and harmony both within and outside the community. This has bestowed Borno state the official slogan "Home of Peace and Hospitality". It will be an unfortunate situation if the government through its well-intentioned "developmental" initiative destroys this great attributes due to lack of specialized consultations on the aspects that pertain to culture and other aspects of people.

Among the numerous benefits of including culture in government's community reconstruction and development plans and policy is the creation of attractive and livable communities. The resultant outcome will be safer, stronger and healthier neighborhoods while significantly enhancing the quality of life of the residents. These in turn creates an enabling environment for sustainable communities, developmental initiatives and inclusive cities.

Since it has been mentioned that the housing project in Kaga is a pilot of the rebuilding project of the affected communities, it is hoped that lessons will be learnt from the experiment and the needful be done by those responsible.

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