

Effective Cultural Administration in Nigeria

A Critical Source Book



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Chapter

8



Cultural Events Management: Principles and Practices

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The common and the scientific use of the term “event” do not coincide with each other. Different terms and definitions for “event” have developed in various areas of life and research; this especially leads to communication and comprehension problems (Thomas et al., 2008).

Introduction

How does one manage what is free? Why does one manage what is free? Culture has been said to be the totality of man’s existence. It is man’s action. Raymond Williams has even said that culture is also cheap and ordinary. This is because man and culture are one. As long as there is man, and his relations and interaction with life, culture exists. This also means that over time, culture has become several things to man. In modern terms, culture has left the traditions, heritage, and customs of a people alone. It has gone into the realm of politics, economics, religion, computer sciences, and even modernity itself. It has also become the central focus in the

discourse of globalization. Because if countries are to share socio-economic and political needs that will help them with political and economic growth, it were better to start from that than from the issues of existence and inter-relationship: culture. For such a wonderful essence of man's everyday existence, it is good to manage culture. This is the thrust of this chapter.

What are the Uses of Culture?

- a) Culture shows the origin, and roots of a people;
- b) It recognizes and identifies the people from other sets of people;
- c) It introduces (where the people are many) the process of cultural diversity, which assist policies of intercultural relationships between people and countries;
- d) Culture allows countries to plan for the future as it reveals the past and sheds more light on the present; and
- e) In more recent times, culture has become a revenue generating tool in association with tourism.

With these uses, it is difficult not to try to preserve or celebrate culture. In simple terms, it has also become a tool for entertainment and a tool for socio-economic development. It is the essence of human dignity of individual citizens, their language, mannerisms, dress code, speech and mode of expressions and attitudes. In Nigeria, cultural semblances and de-similarities have even accounted for the acceptance of marriages and harmony and disharmony with communities.

Why the Celebrations of Culture?

Man has always celebrated aspects of his life and existence. It is innate in him to express himself, either when he is happy or sad. Man has cleverly divided his life into these two major aspects of emotional outpour. The social, not too serious and very celebrative aspect, when he celebrates the birth of children, the marrying of wives, age grade performances, coronation ceremonies, and festivals that have to do with happiness and joy. Then, there is the serious, ritual, close to religious aspect of celebration. Sometimes, tears are involved. Emotions, a process of cleansing, purgation of the ills of the society are involved. The element of belief is the essence here. Man believes that once this is done, and the celebration takes place,

life, generally, and personal problems, specifically, will be resolved. We must quickly add that as part of man's early culture, he had embedded little gods in every aspect of his life; and such gods become metaphors of such celebrations either in social or serious celebrations. Man believes also that if he celebrates culture, he marks the good or ills of a given year, and asks for a better one next year, for all to be well. Celebration of culture, therefore, becomes:

- a) Man's constant link with his environment.
- b) His celebration of the nostalgia of the past.
- c) His expression of his expectations of the immediate future.
- d) The measurement of development: upgrading, changing, amending, readapting and infusing, new thoughts, songs, costumes, styles and form to the pattern of celebration.

Again, this shows how important it is for man to celebrate his culture. In recent times, man has turned culture into a show off tool of superiority, of intimidation, of one nation trying to out-do another, by giving a rich display of its cultural heritage.

“The Event”

The first definition one can understand of “events” is that they are “temporary occurrences; either planned or unplanned” (Getz 4). A second definition is seen to be a “one time or infrequently occurring event outside a normal programme” (Getz 4). Either way, an event is a programme, an occasion or a performance. An event can be described as grand, or small, depending on the magnitude of the planning. In recent times, we have had instances of mega events, when it is propelled from a national event to a world event with all the digital, IT and technology beaming assistance to it, to make it reachable to the whole world at once. Good examples are the World Cup, and the Olympic Games – where the interest of almost all the countries of the world, all the continents are involved and represented within competitive spirits.

Need for Managements of Events

Management is planning. It is the careful organization of events so that they make a major impact. In the olden days, each community, as earlier mentioned, had its own forms of planning and organization of cultural events. Once the dates and seasons of

worship or celebrations of particular gods were established, the king, who was the paramount king and head of all cultural establishments, appointed priests, elders, and leaders, who saw to the handling of such delicate details, as to the purchase of animals for sacrifices, guilds that would perform, and chiefs that would officiate. Since revenue generation was not the immediate goal, and the target audience were known and established, it was easier to plan. But a form of management was in place, all the same, to make things work well and smoothly in order to ensure successful festivals. Events, when well planned and managed, can serve the following functions:

- a) Give the erstwhile loose cultural performances set forms in terms of content.
- b) Give the performances structures, instead of the endless performance structure, which can last for days, usually associated with cultural performances.
- c) Help with the dynamics of a culturally diversified society, like the one we have in Nigeria.

After the civil war in Nigeria, it became glaring that there was need to look for issues that can bind the different ethnic groups and tribes together. Culture was chosen by government as a tool for national unity. The National Festival for Arts and Culture (NAFEST) was started, in this light, to help find areas of similarities between cultural entities, break cultural barriers, and further cement cultural and national unity among the Nigerian people. And as Africa grew as a region, and joined the world polity, there was need for a document on its policy towards culture. This gave birth to the *Cultural Policy for Nigeria* (1988) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which was signed into law in 1988. It must be stated here that no government of any nation can plan or manage the culture of its people without a cultural policy. And since the people and their culture are not static, UNESCO has advised member nations to review their cultural policies every ten years.

But a greater need for the management of cultural events had emerged with the development and growth of tourism in the mid-twentieth century. Tourism, which is simply defined as, the act of turning culture, which we used to take for granted, into business, meant most importantly that culture needed to be managed properly. New keywords like, culture as a “product” started to emerge. Culture

was now seen as a “revenue generating tool,” especially at the time when Nigeria was in search of an alternative to oil, which had earlier on been the mainstay of their economy.

Principles and Practices

So, what are the principles of managing a cultural event? There are different types of cultural events. We have already mentioned some of the reasons for the traditional small-scale cultural events. But that is not all. There are larger-scale events, which I intend to discuss below.

Why?

The first question is the reason why? For whom is the cultural event planned for? Is it a competition of secondary schools? Is it traditional performances with the Chairman of the Local Government Council coming? Is it the New Yam festival, with the King and other Royal fathers attending? Is it the State Festival for Arts and Culture with Governor coming as Guest of Honour? Is it the Abuja Carnival with the Honourable Minister coming as the Chief Host and the President as Special Guest of Honour? Or is it the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting with 54 Heads of Governments coming, and the Queen of England and Head of the Commonwealth as the Chief Guest? Each occasion, no matter what scale, no matter the grandeur, must be well managed, because reputation, identity, integrity and national pride are involved.

Government Planners

The government manages cultural events from the grass root levels to the international level. The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation organizes most of government’s cultural events. They have parastatals, or Ad-hoc Agencies, that are set up specifically for specific events. Sometimes, other ministries like Foreign Affairs handle international programmes and invite the various ministries to handle their special areas.

Private Cultural Event Planners

These days, there are also private cultural event planners. Each has different models for planning events and such plans are also

discussed at the initial stage of appointing who the Event Manager should be. Basically, the same issues, the reason for the event, the venue, the funding, and the target audience are discussed. But, usually, ample time is needed for planning before an event.

Who?

Who are the target audience? Who is the event meant for? What do we give to them? What aspects would they like to see? Would it be a public event or a closed event?

Venue

Where will it take place? In search of life, a dying and fading National Theatre once came up with the logo that, “if the event matters to you, the National Theatre is the place.” Great catch phrase, but bad structure at the time! The venue, especially in these days of security problems, means a lot to people. You may plan a great cultural festival, but if you choose old venues, like school halls without air conditioning, you might lose your audience.

Budget

This is the key to all management plans. How do you manage a programme without funds? Funds determine the magnitude of the programme you intend to have. You may seek for sponsors. Some may even brand aspects of the programme.

Participants

The way you attract the audience for any other event is the same way you would attract the participants or performers for a cultural event. A sellable programme that will attract the audience to come is advisable. Spectacle and colour are major, central points of any enjoyable cultural programme.

Event Marketing: Media and Publicity

The activities connected with the planning and control of events, are generally summarized under the terms, “event marketing,” or “event management.” Always, these are the money-gobblers in any planning exercise. No one will know of your programme, no matter

how well-planned, if it is not well announced.

The basic reasons for the principles of the need for the management of cultural events are based on:

- a) The intrinsic concern by individuals and groups of people to excel in whatever they take part in or organize. It has been found that to organize projects properly saves money; it saves time and it allows one to come out tops within a competitive society.
- b) The world itself is getting smaller, and creative cultural clusters are becoming issues of discuss; the success of one well-planned and managed event could lead to interconnectivity; a connection with the international creative sector that could open further the efforts of one country to the world.
- c) Culture also makes money for the country when well managed. Festivals like Argungu and Osun-Osogbo are already in the international calendar. If well managed, they will earn foreign exchange for the country.
- d) With many well organized and managed cultural events, Nigeria and her cities could be the hub country of creative talents. It will be a welcome alternative to the impression the world holds about the country in terms of 419 and insecurity.

Conclusion

I will like to end this chapter by emphasizing the importance of managing a cultural event. The benefits are many. Such events are to help:

- a) Develop creative talents among the youths as they are inspired by successful programmes, which they either see or participate in;
- b) Educate the world about the creative essence of the Nigerian people; and
- c) Allow Nigeria to emerge as a respected power house in the creative economy.

One thing is clear that as the world grows, so will its uses of culture continue to grow; and the content, context and aesthetics of cultural events will continue to create problems of communication and comprehension, as stated by Oliver Thomas and his colleagues in

the opening quotation of this chapter, because it continues to enlarge in meaning, uses and form. But one thing that is indisputable is cultures' usefulness to man; hence, the importance of good management of man's attempt to showcase it as an event and as an agent of development.

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