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## TANZANIA CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### INTRODUCTION: HOW CULTURE RELATES TO DEVELOPMENT

In the TAKNET debate on the current topic, the contribution by a fellow named Julius M. Limbitu seems quite appropriate to open the discussion in this Brief. He said: "Culture involves what people value in terms of customs, beliefs, aspirations, the meaning of life, perceptions, among other views", then adding "the habit of working, like type of work, duration of work, commitment to efficiency and effectiveness in work, are all dependent upon the inner culture values." This quasi-theoretical piece is relevant to our analysis.

The debate in TAKNET was occasioned by the need to include the cultural element in the process of identifying Tanzania Strategy for Economic Growth as a prerequisite for preparing MKUKUTA-II. The logic is that our culture has indeed a significant effect on our economic fate and prospects. But such outcome is often intertwined with/and encumbered or facilitated by political behaviour and economic decisions of the past, in a dynamic manner; thus it is difficult to quantify or manage strategically or in a planned fashion. This nebulous character has made policy and institutionalisation of cultural development very challenging. Thus cultural development is dependent upon a tenuous environment with varieties of habits, values, beliefs, principles, taboos, and preferences of social and age groups of people that appear as acceptable ways of doing things. Clear-cut overall economic outcome in such an environment is therefore uncertain.

### THE OBJECTIVE OF THE BRIEF

This Brief is not meant to proclaim a policy. It is intended to stimulate public discussion further after the TAKNET forum on how to strengthen our

development policy by looking at our cultural traditions for clues and solutions to unleash realisation of growth potentials and far reaching poverty reduction. The aspect of cultural impact on development is invoked in Vision 2025 and a bit in MKUKUTA -I (2005-2010). In MKUKUTA-II it is inserted more vividly but without sufficiently concentrating on the dynamics of the interlink with economic development.

### SELECTED THEORETICAL OPINIONS ON CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT

A number of scholars have tried to dig into the culture challenge, but in this Brief we limit it to those with leading propositions relevant to our topic.

In "Cultures Matters" Laurence Harrison & Samuel P. Huntington (2000) put forward some hypothesis as to why poor countries differ from developed nations: by emphasizing the cultural virtues such as "thrift, investment, hard work, education, organization, and discipline", which the former countries mostly badly lack. In developed countries these assets are supplemented by or manifested in higher virtues of traditional societies with resistant cultures – carrying desirable attributes of love, justice, courage, magnanimity, though these can at times be crowded out by "lesser virtues" engendered by productive societies.

Western values fortunately or unfortunately have been fast globalising the cultures in developing countries to the point where progress in the Western cultural standards and whims have become a virtually universal aspiration, as Harrison points out, being seen as "less

burdensome, more fulfilling life and ... desired by all". Nonetheless, he concedes that there may indeed be significant cultural differences among developing countries due to local factors in how they take in globalised cultures. Geography matters, as indeed are political realities, history, and the dynamics of cultural development.

It would seem that Harrison and Huntington read copiously of Max Weber's "Economy and Society" (1908) to explain the impact of geography and history on the differences of development among different countries (e.g. Japan and China, Mexico and USA, etc ). Geoffrey Sachs lately clarifies these differences with regard to tropical countries, and like David Landes (1998) asserting that tropical geography and harsh climate weigh down prospects for development. He argues that despite advances in transportation and communications, the cultural differences remain (though successful economic development of Hong Kong, Barbados and Singapore may cast doubt on such proposition).

Still, an additional and intriguing question is that if geography matters, then why is it that some groups do better than others? That happens even when they are living under similar economic and political circumstances. Vivid examples are minorities that thrive in a variety of countries: e.g. Indians in East Africa, West Indies, Mauritius<sup>1</sup>, etc) while the native majorities in hosting countries do not. Or why is it that tribes in East Africa that have been divided between Kenya and Tanzania for instance seem to be developing at slightly different speeds. Culture makes more or less all the distinction in development outcomes, David Landes still asserts. He cites the venturing attitudes of expatriate minorities - Chinese, Lebanese, and Jews in various geographic locations and climates and even those living under various political regimes.

### IMPACT OF CULTURAL CHANGE ON DEVELOPMENT

Most observers would agree that our culture is under stress from incursions of modernity, relocation in habitat or pecuniary needs; and it is

changing rapidly. The changes occur by assimilation (or mimicking) of alternative cultures, leading to adjustment with new languages or axioms, dresses, religions, tastes, foods, or other elements, and unfortunately glorification of leisure over hard toil.

Particular cultures take in changes in different ways and correspondingly with different economic outcomes, influenced by transaction costs. These depend on the behaviour of individual persons as well as institutions. At the institutional level, cultural influences are regulated by rules, written procedures and incentive systems (e.g. via the Civil Service Reform Programme, the Public Procurement Reform<sup>2</sup>, etc) to minimize informality and individual habit preferences. Thus policy measures can be put in place that promote development enhancing culture to achieve good governance, probity, judicious and equitable use of resources, respect for law and order, etc, and these must be preserved by law. Good education, hard work, thrift, honesty, patience, tenacity, mentioned by Max Webber (Economy and Society) in connection with the Japanese development miracle (ideologically dubbed the protestant spirit which Landes passionately supported), are other ideals that could be added to the list. Hope and audacity are other principles preferred by Reginald Mengi.

In Tanzania our culture has been altered in psyche, like on how we look at entrepreneurship. Many years of ujamaa (inherently an excellent model) left a big dose of anti-entrepreneurial attitudes, envy, and corruption. The sudden change from Ujamaa inflamed these evils plus other vices like banditry, fraud and selfishness. In summing up the new situation in the introductory remarks to the Tanzania's Vision 2025 Document, former President Mkapa said: "The mindset of the leaders and people of Tanzania has neither been supportive of hard work, ingenuity and creativity, nor has it provided a conducive environmental for these attributes to emerge. .... Consequently, a culture of admiring "effortless" success has erupted and, with it, productive individual initiative and the spirit of the community

1. Although people in same ethnic groups who stayed in home countries remained utterly impoverished until recently when their own governments began to actively facilitate development

2. Such as using OPRAS and SASE, though both have not been successful

development have not taken a positive shape “. This statement is by a seasoned political practitioner: it is also quite germane to our analysis.

### **TAKNET CONTRIBUTIONS**

The TAKNET contributions were mainly based on individual perceptions and experiences at home, work and in foreign travel. They nearly all seem to agree that our culture has, with few exceptions, been a stumbling block to development. But they differ on the causes of the retrogression of the culture, implying that factors that underlie unhelpful cultures in our midst are diverse. Here is a summary of the contributions, with some comments:

#### **(a) Impact of Poverty**

Years of impoverishment, punctuated with crises of famine and family mishaps, tend to breed pessimism about the future, including unexcited reception of government statements on opportunities carried by new policies. “It is hard to look beyond the day when you are barely keeping alive from lack of resources”, says Gabor Z Siklosi. Poor mind-set and low expectations sink in. In such circumstances, one can see the rationale of low-level targeting of income, indicated in the contributions by Omari Mwinyi Khamis and others, the fragile incentives to work hard beyond that income, then laziness, then seeking solace “in playing bao on endless hours” or spending a lot of time and money in wedding festivities (mentioned by Kabuje Furaha and Khamis). But then the vicious circle traps the poor into a culture of reckless exploitation of the resources they have (fisheries, land, forests, etc). Unfortunately, as one contributor lamented, the skewed spending habits (and laziness) transcend individual and family limits to government levels (Furaha). Of course, Khamis refutes the assertion that Africans are lazy. If it is by nature, his point is correct, but specific incentives/disincentives have ingrained the element (if not the trait) of idleness.

#### **(b) Modernity and Globalisation**

All is not lost, however, since people are not encased, so to speak, in traditional customs and cultures and kept away from global influences. The contrary is happening. People, especially the young, are literally being bombarded with foreign things and messages through radio, newspapers,

TVs, internet, bill boards, etc . In fact Siklosi in TAKNET takes this phenomenon to be a boon and not a boomerang: It can be harnessed and converted to implant in the youth fresh energies for entrepreneurship and drive, and not defeatism

#### **(c) Hard Work by All for All**

Mwinyi, Furaha, Kapongola Ngayanyuka, Emmanuel Patroba Mbache and Julius Limbitu all hammer down the need for hard work. They agree that when this attribute is well ingrained into cultural traditions, the society prospers. The best practice is exemplified in the Chaggas, a hard working people now spreading out all over Tanzania. Though sometimes they attract envy, more often they spur imitation or simply straightforward admiration. The current writer believes that if the national pride in multiculturalism has any meaning, it should not burry such tribal distinctiveness but should boldly appreciate what Michael Porter (2000) called good virtues in societal progress. Emmanuel Patroba Mbache emphasises copying the cooperative spirit as example. Yet while hard work is necessary, it should be rewarding for all who contribute to it. Here comes the issue of governance (next subject) and ujamaa (late President Nyerere’s brainchild). Hard working was at the centre of ujamaa. Nyerere fought hard to inculcate this virtue in Tanzanians, like in Uhuru na Kazi, Kazi ni Uhai, etc. But then think of the Swahili cliché of Pole Na Kazi that was (is) evocative of the Swahili culture to regard hard work as undignified toil, contrary to leisurely postures (barazani, kijiweni, umwinyi, etc). Our society has still to fight such lingering habits and condemn them through policy and political statements.

#### **(d) Good Governance**

This subject can include many aspects, and thus is too difficult to compress in this short Brief. In the TAKNET discussions some contributors mentioned the skewed spending habits of one’s meagre resources, e.g. on lavish weddings, and worse when such habits transcend to public resources spending (Apronius Mbilinyi and Deo Mutalemwa). They cited external aid being squandered, or office time being wasted (Khamis and Kabuje). In an attempt to build up a conducive working environment, the government initiated the Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP) to instil discipline at work and change civil service

mentality, to incentivise the workforce through better pay and performance evaluation (OPRAS-Kabuje), as well as to enhance community awareness, accountability and participation at the grassroots through the Decentralization Reform.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The subject of culture is complex. It permeates all processes of life activities at individual and national levels. Yet TAKNET contributors found it hard to suggest specific policy measures to promote positive culture. The following areas may be pertinent for further research, debate and refinement so as to make headway in public policy action :

1. Efforts to encourage and absorb new technology and ideas: these should go hand in hand with strong and broad-based national education to ensure that peoples' minds and abilities identify and adopt positive elements to improve upon their culture and not for its wholesale transmutation.
2. The state's obligation to safeguard and defend peoples' individual rights: The state has to promote freedom of information, incentives to learning and self improvement and generally

empower civil society to plan common actions for their betterment, i.e. promote the culture of participatory informed decision-making.

3. Creating equity of conditions: It is important to strive for creating equity of conditions (opportunity) affecting everybody rather than actual equality for every individual, that tends to encourage envy and apathy or simply blind following of trends and, in the extreme, mass mentality (a reprehensive consensus under which everybody blindly follows what the majority seemingly want).

4. Certain traditional values need to be protected and promoted: like family values, the cooperative spirit, or the savings culture.

5. Should cultural change thus be included in development planning? Yes: e.g. institution practices need to be properly documented, both for memory of the past but more importantly for regulating future practices, E.g. to install cultural transformation for proper conduct for accountability (Festo Maro), timeliness of actions, respect for others and established institutional order, judicious use of resources (Maro), etc.

### OTHER TAKNET POLICY BRIEFS

1. Growth and Poverty Reduction in Tanzania: Why such a Mismatch? (Policy Brief number 1)
2. The Role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Enhancing the Livelihood of the Rural Poor (Policy Brief number 2)
3. Incentive Package for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Tanzania (Policy Brief number 3)
4. Tatizo la Walemavu wa Ngozi (Albino) Tanzania: Nini Kifanyike? (The Plight of Albino in Tanzania) (Policy Brief number 4)
5. Petroleum Policy and Constitutional Paradox in the United Republic of Tanzania (Policy Brief Number 5)
6. Tanzania National Poverty Reduction Framework – MKUKUTA What are the Lessons (Policy Brief number 6)
7. The Effect of Global Financial Crisis and Way Forward for Tanzania (Policy brief number 7)
8. 2009/10 Government Budget: What impact should be expected? (Policy Brief number 8)
9. Social Welfare and Ageing in Tanzania (Policy Brief number 9)



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