

## Value of Traditional Ceremonies in Socio-Economic Development. A Case of Some Selected Traditional Ceremonies in Zambia

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**Abstract:** Zambia has a rich history and diversity of traditional ceremonies. Traditional ceremonies are a time honoured form of communication and provide a vibrant record of common heritage. This article developed out of a study to establish the value of traditional ceremonies plays in socio – economic development. Data was collected through interviews and observation of activities and practices across selected traditional ceremonies in Zambia. Findings revealed that traditional ceremonies add value to socio – economic development in different ways and therefore there is need to manage them well by the state. From the findings, it was recommended that there is need to carefully explore and document the enormous socio-economic benefits inherent in Zambia's multiple traditional ceremonies so as to derive lesson and opportunities that can inform economic growth and social development. In addition, there is also need to streamline access to and disbursement of the budgetary allocations for activities related to traditional ceremonies such as research (by institutions of learning) documentation of traditional knowledge.

**Keywords:** Traditional Ceremonies, Culture and Society, Socio – economic, Development

### 1. BACKGROUND

With over seventy (70) ethnic groups, Zambia has a diverse and rich cultural heritage. Traditional ceremonies celebrated by indigenous cultural groups remain a vital part of the country's cultural heritage. Traditional ceremonies are a time honoured form of communication and provide a vibrant record of our common heritage. The heritage includes dances, songs, crafts and artefacts that have been passed down through generations (Guhrs & Kapwepwe, 2009). Traditional ceremonies are events of social, spiritual, religious or public significance performed on special occasions for various reasons. The traditional ceremonies performed in Zambia vary in nature. Some of them are small closed initiation ceremonies. Others involve an entire village. Then there are those which are open and attract large crowds in the tens of thousands and even include the head of state and leaders of opposition. These have a nationally designated calendar month for their celebration. Speaking about the calendrical traditional ceremonies, Taylor (2006) observes that, as of 2002, Zambia had some 20 and perhaps as many as 57 so-called traditional ceremonies of migration and conquest, offerings to ancestors, and so forth, and “the number increases yearly” and currently there are more than thirty traditional ceremonies across Zambia.

### 2. CONCEPTS ABOUT TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES

From birth, through marriage to death, human life in Zambia and elsewhere is punctuated by ‘ceremony’ of one type or the other. Thus, to ignore ‘ceremony’ is to ignore the very essence and purpose of being human. This article focuses only on traditional ceremonies. Such a focus is justified for a number of reasons. The government in Zambia and other stakeholders are strongly urged to sustain traditional ceremonies for the numerous positive benefits including socio – economic development. From the findings, the following were discovered as the main socio – economic contribution from the traditional ceremonies.

### **2.1. Business Avenue**

Traditional ceremonies and festivals can potentially boost businesses of the host community. It is a well-known fact that the actual days for most traditional ceremonies in Zambia are preceded and succeeded by a few days of pre-and post mini traditional activities. Local, regional and international visitors flock into the host community days before the main event. These became potential customers for most businesses like hospitality, cafeteria bars or liquor stores to mention but a few.

There are more than 90 Annual Traditional Ceremonies in Zambia manifesting customs, social life, rituals, oral history, material and spiritual culture. During traditional ceremonies, most business men and women from different parts of the country and from the host communities find a platform to sell their goods and products. As can be seen in figure 1 below, the 2018 Shimunenga Traditional Ceremonies also provided a market for second hand clothes business men and women.



**Figure1.** *SMEs at 2018 Shimunenga Ceremony*

The situation is similar during most traditional ceremonies across the country. Another case in point is what happened during the Kulamba Traditional Ceremony for the Chewa where thousands of people attended. Many camped at the site for more than a week to sell their products as shown in figure 2 below:



**Figure2.** *SMEs at 2019 Kulamba Ceremony*

This scenario has some economic value to the host community as it promotes some injection of revenue into the host community. These claims are consistent with the arguments by Kuuder, Adongo, & Abanga (2014) that traditional ceremonies bring most of the citizens together to contribute financially and this helps to initiate development projects and that visitors who also came to witness the festival contributed economically to the progress of the locality through their spending in the area.

They also expatiated on the economic impact of events seeing them as catalyst in rejuvenating local economies. Kuuder et al. (2014) further discovered that Kakube festival, a traditional ceremony in Ghana, boosted the image of the host community because it tagged the town on the festival map of the country, drawing people from all walks of life to participate including foreigners (tourists) to have a feel of the heritage of the town.

## **2.2. Tourism potential**

Traditional festivals attract individuals from all walks of life. In most cases, attendees at traditional ceremonies are there to witness traditional activities and practices. Traditional festivals promote creation of traditional markets and brands in host villages and/or communities rich in traditional, performing and visual arts and craft. In the process, these events become a means of livelihood and empowerment to members of the host community.

According to Andari (2016), calendrical traditional festivals and ceremonies events become an important role in attracting visitors and tourists to a host community annually as many organisers and responsible government and local ministries put these events on annual and marketing plans. In Zambia for example, a calendar has been drawn by the ministry of Chiefs and traditional affairs indicating traditional ceremonies and the period of the year in which they take place. A list of dates for gazetted traditional ceremonies is easily downloadable from the ministries website.

At the large scale, traditional ceremonies do and can earn the country the much-needed revenue while at the same time helping promote cultural heritage. The vast potential held in the ceremonies can amplify the tourism potential that Zambia is endowed with and bring in foreign earnings. Traditional ceremonies should be supported because they preserve culture, which helps to boost tourism.

## **2.3. Unity and Social Cohesiveness**

Almost all communities are assortments of people belonging to various political, religious, economic and social classes among others. These classes, if not handed well, are a source of disunity. However, traditional ceremonies act as unifier of people that may have been divided based on social classes. As people assemble for a reminder of their traditional practices, a sense of oneness and belongingness is created (Mkandawire & Daka, 2018). Since they are founded on common beliefs, values, norms and practices of subscribed members, traditional ceremonies act as a platform for socialisation and promotion of unity in diversity.

Man is not only a social animal but also a cultured being. Man's social life has been made possible because of culture. Culture is something that has elevated him from the level of animal to the heights of man (Brey, 2014). The importance of traditional ceremonies lies in its close association with the ways of thinking and living, these cultural values and beliefs manifest themselves through our life style. The success of our traditional ceremonies and activities in Zambia is in giving us a sense of pride. Through these ceremonies, knowledge gets transmitted from the old to the younger generation through rites of passage and other lessons. During this time, different age groups of children are trained and taught dances and all the proceedings of the ceremony.

Traditional ceremonies also give people an identity and serve as a reminder of people's history. Every culture is unique and there are no chances at all that there will be a group that will share a ceremony. The other social relevance of traditional ceremonies is their potential to foster and encourage peace and unity among a group of people. They also broaden the outlooks of individuals by providing them with a set of rules for co-operation. During the ceremonies one ceases to think only about himself but a whole as a part of a society. It was amazing in 2018 Shimunenga Traditional Ceremonies how the Ila people got together with only one aim of celebrating their ancestors and bracketing all their differences in political religious and other social strata.

## **2.4. Revival And/or Sustenance of Traditional Handcraft Industries**

Undoubtedly, the handcraft sector is a potential tool for poverty reduction as it plays a vital role in income and employment generation for most hands-on individuals. These events attract local and international clients who are fascinated with traditional aesthetic objects. In the case of the ceremony in Kazungula in Chief Mukuni, most of the people there sell their craft and art work as seen in the picture below.



**Figure3.** Curio market at Mukuni Village during the 2018 Basilombelombe festival

Despite this, the sector is almost extinct in Zambia due to stiff competition from globalised and modernised industries. Conversely, traditional ceremonies have the potential to breathe life into these dying traditional industries as noted above.

### **2.5. Rural Development Tool**

Most traditional leaders in Zambia stay in rural areas and undoubtedly, rural areas remain part of the disadvantaged sections of the Zambian society when it comes to development. Luckily, rural areas remain the major hosts for tradition ceremonies and hubs for traditional leadership and custodians for cultural beliefs and practices. Additionally, rural areas remain the major host for natural resources. Therefore, hosting traditional ceremonies in such areas opens several developmental opportunities to rural areas.

### **2.6. Denouncing Perceived Traditional Harmful And/or Discriminatory Practices**

No culture is immune to some negative aspect. As Idang (2018:101) states: “... culture generally, and African culture in particular, is like a two-sided coin. It has soul- lifting, glamorous and positive dimensions even though it is not completely immune from some negative outcomes. Traditional ceremonies are used as platforms to denounce traditional harmful practices. For instance, Kuuder et al. (2014) argues that Kakube traditional festival in Ghana did not only attract tourist but “...was used as a platform to campaign against bushfire....”

The situation is similar in Zambia where most traditional leaders have used calendrical ceremonial events as platforms to denounce traditional harmful practices. In 2018, during his ceremonial tour of the kingdom, Paramount Chief Kalonga Gawa Undi of the Chewa people of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique banned:

*Chokolo (forcing wife or husband to marry a family member after losing their legal spouses often for selfish motives), the Fisi Concept (employing a mystery man to test the skills of a young girl who has just come of age is now illegal and prohibited in Chewa culture). Other practices outlawed are sexual cleansing, Chidyerano (a practice where men forcibly exchange their wives for sexual variety against the women’s will), Early Marriages where no girl below 16 years should be married off.*

He also ordered that boys above 16 should be in Gule Wamkulu Initiation adding that initiates for Gule and Girl’s Initiation (Chinamwali) that are attending school should only be initiated during school holidays and allowed to attend school programs when asked to by school authorities (<https://www.zambianobserver.com/gawa-undi-bans-chidyerano-wife-swapping-among-the-chewa/>).

The above traditional practices reflect values and beliefs held by members of a community for periods often spanning generations. Every social grouping in the world has specific traditional cultural practices and beliefs, some of which are beneficial to all members, while others are harmful to a specific group, such as women. Despite their harmful nature and their violation of international human rights laws, such practices persist because they are not usually questioned and take on an aura of morality in the eyes of those practising them (United Nations, 1995). However, chiefs are now using traditional ceremonies to denounce and/or outlaw such practices. At the 2019 Kulamba

ceremony of Paramount Chief Gawa Undi, the following posters were displayed to demonstrate his commitment to fighting early marriages:



**Figure4.** *Poster mounted along the great East road, 30th August, 2019*



**Figure5.** *Poster mounted along the great East road, 30th August, 2019*

The above figures show some one of the efforts towards ending child marriages in Chewa land. The photos were mounted around the host community of Kalamba traditional ceremony and were meant to disseminate information to majority people who converge in the area for the ceremony. This justifies the argument that calendrical traditional events are platforms to deprecate negative aspects of local traditions.

## **2.7. Job Creation**

Cultural ceremonies facilitate for employment creation. Business owners of the host community need manpower to run their businesses. This allows for employment of locals, hence contributing to the unemployment rate of that locality. Additionally, some governments like the Zambia government have established ministries, units and/or departments in charge of managing, documenting and planning for traditional ceremonies. Cases in point include Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs and Ministry of Tourism among others. These sectors employ skilled and semi-skilled personal from the host communities of these ceremonies and external communities. Such sectors contribute to raising the employment levels of the nation.

## **2.8. Partnership Development**

Traditional ceremonies present a platform partnership creation between host communities and state and/or non-state development actors. It is most during these ceremonies that most development sectors renew their commitment to facilitating development in the host communities. This argument is in tandem Richard's (2013) discovery that Asogli, a traditional festival celebrated in the Volta region of Ghana, acts as a platform for social cohesion and the launch of developmental projects such as school buildings, toilet facilities roads and construction of good drinking water sources.

Richard's finding is not foreign to the Zambian scenario. As organisers of various ceremonies plan for these events, they call upon different NGOs to partner with them in improving the welfare of the

chiefdom and also contributing funds towards the ceremony. A good example is the 2019 Kulamba traditional ceremony where the chiefdom partnered with different NGOs in helping improve the girl child education. These girls are the future development actors of the chiefdom. Kalonga Gawa Undi has observed that promoting child education and ending early marriages in his vast kingdom is such an involving task. For this reason, he has allowed various Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) operate in the kingdom to promote child education and end early marriage. Among these NGOs are SAWA, Paralegal, Network for People living with HIV/AIDS (NPLHA), KWATU, PLAN International, YES I DO, Neighbourhood and Safe-motherhood.

These NGOs have different agendas in the kingdom. For example, Paralegal have formed groups from the villages that conduct meetings with community members on the danger of early marriages and teenage pregnancies. They also talk about the advantages of educating a girl child as well as child education in general. They also have meetings with teenage boys and girls where they explain issues of abstinence, working hard at school, use of condoms and distribute condoms where possible. It must be mentioned that these organizations work with the help of subordinate chiefs and village headmen who coordinate meetings with community members. Organization such a Paralegal and Plan International have gone further in distributing bicycles to facilitators of such programmes in the community. USAID is also using education development assistance and PEPFAR funding to assist the Ministry of Education with strengthening educational support for vulnerable students in its community schools. They have also put up posters that promote sending boys and girls to school and ending early marriages. These partnerships contribute to the development of the kingdom.

### **2.9. Potential Challenges**

Traditional ceremonies, if not well handled, may create room for promotion of ethnicity and tribalism. Much as traditional ceremonies promote cohesiveness especially among members of a particular ethnic group or tribe, excessive emphasis should not be on promotion of that group's culture as superiority to other local cultures as doing so may lead to ethnic and tribal conflict. Emphasis should be on promotion of uniqueness of that group's cultural activities and what others may learn from them.

Traditional ceremonies risk turning into political battlefield if organisers of such events do not treat them as apolitical ceremonies. Traditional ceremonies have the potential to create a battleground for infidelity, promiscuity and for many other risk behaviours that support the spread of Sexuality Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS. They create a market for sex tourists and sex workers.

Since traditional ceremonies have the muscle attract people from all corners of the nation, region and world, they also potential refugee camps for externals. These events may open the area to aliens who may come with ill intentions of thieving, human trafficking and other dangerous acts which could have been not common in the area.

Much as partnerships with state and non-state are good for local development, organisers of the events must be worry of the danger of turning a ceremony into a launch for the programmes and services of partners (United Nations, 2010). Excessive use of commercial adverts at the main arena and branded outfits by locals risk defeats the purpose of a traditional ceremony which should be dominated by traditional paintings, dressings and artistic decorations.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

In this regard, there is great need for political decision-makers and local, national and international social actors to integrate the principles of traditional ceremonies and the values of cultural pluralism into all public policies, mechanisms and practices, particularly through public/private partnerships. This strategy aims, on the one hand, at incorporating culture into all development policies, be they related to education, science, communication, health, environment or cultural tourism. On the other hand, it aims at supporting the development of the cultural sector through creative industries. By contributing in this way to poverty alleviation, culture offers important benefits in terms of social cohesion.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is therefore recommended that for traditional ceremonies to contribute to socio – economic development, there is need to take into consideration the following:

- Involve a lot of private institutions in the preparation and sensitisation. These institutions should be involved in coming up with projects to be done within the chiefdoms.
- There is need for more innovations in the way traditional ceremonies are held.
- Each year, the chiefdom(s) should come up with themes of development which should be in line with the government strategic plans.
- Activities for the ceremony in the chiefdom should be throughout the year to make the participants ever active.
- The community, public and international media houses should be involved in the advertising of the ceremonies so that more tourists can attend.
- More Zambians need to get involved in attending these ceremonies to boost the sale of local products
- Associations/ ceremony organisers must be oriented on the organising aspect
- Individuals holding party/political positions should not be part of the traditional associations
- Wearing of political regalia must be discouraged at traditional ceremonies
- Sponsors who partner with organising committee must be given terms of reference/guidelines.

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