

# **POSITION PAPER: THE DIMENSIONS OF ETHNICITY, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN NIGERIA**

**Nigeria: Drivers of Change**

**Component Three – Output 28**

Prepared for DFID, Nigeria

**[FINAL REPORT]**

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## Abbreviations

CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDA	Community Development Association
CPR	Common Property (or Pool) Resource
DFID	(United Kingdom) Department For International Development
DVD	Digital Video Disc
FEPA	Federal Environmental Protection Agency
FGN	Federal Government of Nigeria
FMARD	Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Ethnicity Development
FME	Federal Ministry of Environment
FMWR	Federal Ministry of Water Resources
GoN	Government of Nigeria
LDC	Less-Developed Country
LG	Local Government
LGA	Local Government Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SG	State Government
SMARD	State Ministry of Agriculture and Ethnicity Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's (Education) Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VCD	Video CD
WB	World Bank

## **1. Introduction**

As part of the DFID-Nigeria ‘Drivers of change’ Initiative, the consultant was requested to ‘provide in-depth analysis to inform the Department for International Development (DFID) Nigeria’s Drivers of Change initiative on the role of the ethnicity, language and culture dimension as a barrier to change or driver of change in Nigeria’. Component Three will build on the work undertaken in Component One and ‘will provide detailed, Nigeria-specific information about each driver using a standardized methodological approach. Analysis of each individual driver will form the basis for an analysis of the inter-relationship between each driver resulting in a better understanding of how different processes and forces within Nigeria’s political economy can influence political, economic and social change’. Output 28 is the ‘ethnicity, language and culture dimension’.

## **2. Overview and Justification**

### **2.1 Scope**

#### **2.1.1 General**

The dimensions of language, culture and ethnicity can be conceptualised in a number of ways, each providing different insights into their character. The present report deals with three inter-related aspects;

1. **Language.** The language diversity of Nigeria is described, the role of language in the media, in education, in politics and its interface with ethnicity and culture.
2. **Ethnicity.** The definition and manipulation of ethnicity in Nigeria, together with the importance of ethnicity in socio-economic structures and defining local and regional politics.
3. **Culture.** A review of the anthropological literature on Nigeria would be undertaken with particular relevance to the nature of political economy, including economic structures, approaches to power and authority and the forms of social capital.

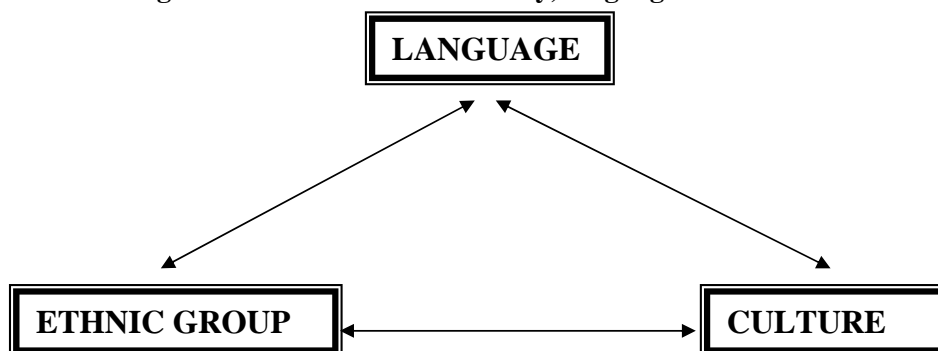
#### **2.1.2 Ethnic group, language and culture**

Individual ethnic groups, their languages and their cultures, are strongly linked but should never be confused. Linguists trying to develop language classifications always warn of the dangers of conflating language and ethnic group distributions but these warnings are routinely disregarded by non-linguists since the language maps produced appear to illustrate handily the distribution of ethnic groups. Indeed, it would be disingenuous to claim that there are *no* general correspondences between language and ethnic distribution, especially in the case of minority groups. Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that the social definition of an ethnic group has many aspects, of which language is just one (Box 1). Figure 1 shows how these three elements can be pictured as independent but interacting.

#### **Box 1. Urban elites and nomadic pastoralists: the Fulani paradox**

The ruling elites in most northern Muslim cities define themselves ethnically as Fulani, as a historical consequence of the conquest of the Hausa city-states in the Jihad that began in 1804. The Fulani are the principal nomadic livestock herders of the West African savannah and still migrate across north-central Nigeria, speaking the Fulfulde language and maintaining a very distinctive culture. The urban Fulani, however, have by and large lost their language, speaking only Hausa, and have certainly lost touch with pastoral culture. Why therefore continue to lay claim to the ethnic label ‘Fulani’, which by now may have problematic connotations in reference to pastoral nomads? Presumably because of a subconscious awareness that a distinctive lifeway has become assimilated and a desire to flag identity in an increasingly homogeneous Hausa culture, thereby linking ‘Fulani’ with the heroic nineteenth century scholars and warriors rather than today’s herders.

Figure 1. Interactions of ethnicity, language and culture



## 2.2 Justification for inclusion of the ethnicity, language and culture dimension

Nigeria is the third most ethnically and linguistically diverse country in the world, after New Guinea and Indonesia<sup>1</sup>. This ethnolinguistic diversity has very significant implications in almost every area of the economy. It implies a major investment in educational and media resources to reach a diverse population. Diverse ethnic groups, with varied cultural patterns, have very different levels of social capital and thus differing capacities to enter into the process of pro-poor change. The relative wealth of the country and the large size of some ethnic groups has allowed them to express their ethnicity in remarkable and sometimes problematic ways that are not mirrored in other similar countries. Dominance of particular ethnic groups in certain sectors of the economy has significant implications for equity. The pattern of dominant and excluded minorities is embedded in the administrative and economic subsystems and has important implications for access to justice and equitable resource-sharing. Ethnic conflict has been a perennial feature of the Nigerian scene since pre-colonial times, but access to modern media and sophisticated weapons has increased the intensity of such conflicts to a degree that threatens the present fragile democracy. The education system, its teaching tools and attitudes reflect strongly the dominant urban culture and effectively exclude monoglot speakers of minority languages in many areas.

## 2.3 Situation of ethnic groups and languages in Nigeria

### 2.3.1 Language versus dialect

Nigeria has at least five hundred languages, although the exact number remains unknown since new languages are regularly being recorded for the first time, while others are disappearing (Blench in press, Box 2). Such a statement inevitably begs the question of the definition of a language. It is often casually said that these languages must be 'dialects' but this is quite false. Dialect, in particular, is a somewhat pejorative term suggesting it is merely a local variant of a 'central' language. In linguistic terms, however, dialect is merely a regional, social or occupational variant of another speech-form, with no presupposition as to its importance or otherwise. But languages in Nigeria are distinct from one another and imply cultural and ethnic variation on a massive scale.

This diversity is very unevenly distributed. Nigeria shows a striking pattern, mixing regions of extremely high diversity with those where a common language has many millions of speakers (Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ethnologue.com/family\\_index.asp](http://www.ethnologue.com/family_index.asp)

Table 1. Ethnodemographic patterns in Nigeria

Category	Locations
Regions with single dominant language	SW (Yorubaland), NE (Kanuri-speaking), North (Hausa), South-Central (Igbo), SE (Ibibio)
Regions of high diversity	Northern Cross River, SW of Niger-Benue Confluence, Jos Plateau, Muri mountains

Broadly speaking, this pattern reflects political antecedents; Hausa, Kanuri and Yoruba have spread and assimilated minority populations through military conquest. Acephalous peoples such as the Igbo and Ibibio have powerful cultural and religious systems that tend to adapt and assimilate the systems of neighbouring peoples. It is often the case that high levels of ethnodemographic diversity are associated with inaccessible areas, such as the Niger Delta or the Mandara mountains.

### 2.3.2 Distribution and use of Second Languages

The use of second languages for communication and in administration was well-established in pre-colonial Nigeria and has further expanded as more diffuse and long-distance migration patterns have required the development of *linguae francae*. Language was strongly connected with the extension of political power; as the Hausa city-states consolidated their hegemony, so many ethnic groups were assimilated and switched to speaking Hausa. In regions where most populations had an acephalous political structure, languages of inter-communication also developed, the most well-known being Efik in the southeast. The colonial era did much to spread specific languages such as Hausa and Yoruba, as it was necessary to develop regional languages of administration<sup>3</sup>.

In the post-Independence era it became necessary to develop specific languages for use in schools and media and the choices made in this arena began the process of politicisation of language issues that continues today. Table 2 shows the major second languages in Nigeria, their location, media profile and status.

#### Box 2. How many languages are there in Nigeria?

It might be thought that the number of languages in a country like Nigeria, which has been researched now for over a century, would now be well established. But in fact the number is constantly changing, reflecting both political ideology, new research and methods of counting. The 1952 Census, which recorded ethnicity, listed just 51 ethnic groups. The first overall estimate traced is in 1958, which gave a figure of 248 languages<sup>2</sup>. The most optimistic figure, from the Ethnologue 2000, is 515, a figure derived by ‘splitting’ many languages that consist of dialect chains into individual languages. Even a more conservative method of counting gives a figure of 466, with several new languages being reported each year. An important reason why new languages are still being recorded is increasing self-awareness of linguistic minorities. Peoples formerly content to be recorded under the name of a larger and more prestigious ethnic group now wish for their own identity to be recognised. Similarly, many peoples previously known by their Hausa name have now switched to their own name. Thus the Sura people of Mangu have become the Mwaghavul and the Jaba of Kwoi the Hyam. This rising ethnic consciousness has important implications, for example for the distribution of educational resources, but also increases the potential for conflict between neighbouring groups when land becomes short. This ethnolinguistic density of one of the highest in the world, although comparable to neighbours of Nigeria such as Cameroun.

<sup>2</sup> The figure of 248 comes from Coleman (1958). The Index of Nigerian Languages (Hansford et al. 1976) counted 394 languages, while the new edition (Crozier & Blench 1992) gives 440. The Ethnologue for 2000 lists 515 living languages, while the as yet unpublished Third Edition of the Index records 466. Wente-Lukas (1985) is an ethnic inventory and records some 550 ethnic groups. Coleman is probably the source of the oft-quoted figure of 250 languages frequently given in the Nigerian Press, and the Federal Government itself recognises no official figure.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, one of the pillars of the colonial service was that officials did not reach their full salary until they were fluent on the ‘local’ language, local being defined as one of these official *linguae francae*. A consequence of this system was that ‘native courts’ could be held in the vernacular, a situation that does not hold true in most parts of the country today, where plaintiffs are forced to operate in English, a system they consider highly unsatisfactory.

**Table 2. *Lingua francae* and major second languages in Nigeria**

Language	Location	Media	Status
Efik	Confined to the Southeast	Local	Declining
English	National language: widely spoken by elites	Throughout country	Expanding
Fulfulde	Spoken across national by pastoralists and as a second language in the region along the northern part of the Nigeria-Cameroun border	Local	Declining
Hausa	Spoken across much of northern Nigeria and between expatriate northerners elsewhere in Nigeria	Widespread throughout north	Variable
Igbo	Standard form spoken between diverse Igbo groups in East-Central region	Local	?
Kanuri	Spoken among Kanuri groups and minorities in the Northeast	Local	Declining
Pidgin	Widely spoken in different forms across much of the South	Not officially recognised	Merging with Standard English
Yoruba	Widely spoken in the Southwest and also by minorities below the confluence	Local	Expanding

### 2.3.3 Literacy

Prior to the European irruption into Nigeria the most significant written documents were those produced in Arabic, or in local languages but written in Arabic (Ajami) script. With the coming of the missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, the first attempts to write down unwritten languages were made. Samuel Crowther, ‘Bishop of the Niger’, was the first to work on a system of Yoruba orthography, to create a dictionary and to translate parts of the New Testament. Since that era, missionaries have been the most important stimulus towards the development of orthographies for Nigerian languages.

Even for ethnic groups where almost all members are Muslims, such as the Fulani and the Kanuri, script development has been by missions<sup>4</sup>. There has been some secular development of orthography, such as the Rivers Readers Project, which developed script and primers for all twenty-five languages of the former Rivers State<sup>5</sup>. Government has for long funded the National Language Centre, which has published orthographies of Nigerian languages. But secular projects have never had the sustainable funding to follow up with schools and adult education programmes. Government commitment has been highly variable over time, but increased self-awareness among larger minorities has led to

#### **Box 3. Kanuri: one language, multiple ethnic groups**

The Kanuri language is usually taken as the language of Maiduguri or Yerwa, now much the largest urban centre in the Northeast. However, Kanuri derives from Kanembu, the classical language of the former kingdoms around Lake Chad and still the language of pastoral nomads such as the Sugurti and the Kuburi. The Kanuri language itself is spoken by a number of different ethnic groups, notably the Manga, the Jetko, the Badawai, the Koyam and the Mober. Some of these people are pastoralists and others settled cultivators, but each keeps their distinctive culture, albeit with common features. It is claimed that some groups such as the Manga speak specific dialects of Kanuri, but population movement and mixtures in the twentieth century have ensured that standard Kanuri is now spoken throughout this region.

<sup>4</sup> Emenanjo (1995: 351) makes the interesting point that there was a paradoxical connection between the unacceptable policies of apartheid South Africa and the development of local language literacy in Nigeria. The Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) of South Africa first began work in the Benue region as early as 1911. Having imbibed the ‘separate development’ ideology in South Africa, it became evident to them that Tiv, Idoma and other regional languages should be developed, while they maintained an island of Dutch in an Anglophone sea. A Vernacular Teachers’ Institute was established in Mkar to produce Tiv teachers as part of the evangelisation process. The DRCM was rightly booted out at Nigerian Independence, but their legacy has been high levels of literacy in Tiv, a state of affairs which has persisted.

<sup>5</sup> For descriptions of the Rivers Readers Project and the literacy situation more generally in this region, see Alagoa (1995) Afiesimama (1995) and Emenanjo (1993, 1995).

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pressure for the teaching of their language in primary schools, a trend that is set to continue. So the literacy panorama continues to be dominated by religious interests.

The size of ethnolinguistic communities has suggested that newspapers, comics and other serial publications would be economically viable in Nigeria. The history of literacy is littered with attempts to start newspapers and newsletters, usually mission-funded and often petering out after a few issues. Government made an attempt in the 1970s to publish a four-page sheet in various second-level languages such as Nupe, Kanuri and Fulfulde, but by failing to consult even its own Language Development Centre, was unable to produce readable text. It seems that Hausa and Yoruba are the main languages where long-lasting print newspapers have been published<sup>6</sup>, but these have fallen into decline and it rare to see them read on the street these days. Ironically, there is a market for comics in Yoruba and these appear to be the most important avenue for the transmission of cultural values through print at present. There are Hausa websites (notably gamji.com) which maintain a competitive news agenda but it seems no other language has invested in new media.

#### **2.3.4 Ethnic groups**

Broadly speaking, there are considerably more ethnic groups than languages; some languages such as Kanuri, encompass numerous ethnic groups (Box 3). Ethnic group is also the locus of identity, rather than language. For example, the Basherawa people of eastern Plateau state have lost their indigenous language, Yangkam, and now only speak Hausa. However, they remain extremely proud of their historical and cultural traditions, and this has probably been brought into focus by being encircled by non-Hausa speakers.

Ethnicity and language have some key contrastive features; language exists as it were, autonomously, with characteristics that can be defined and described irrespective of context. Ethnicity, however, only exists within a given context, its features appear when the matrix in which it is embedded is understood. Nnoli<sup>7</sup> points to the following features of ethnicity;

- ❖ Ethnicity exists a nation-state is characterised by multiple ethnic groups
- ❖ Ethnicity is characterised by an element of common consciousness vis-à-vis other ethnic groups
- ❖ Ethnicity leads to the formation of inclusive/exclusive groups and attitudes
- ❖ This in turn leads to prejudice, discrimination and outright hostility

Nnoli also notes that ethnicity has a positive side which is that it is generally pro-democratic, and promotes the equitable distribution of resources, although this needs to be qualified by saying that this is only within ethnic groups. Ethnicity is also a banner against the remoteness of government, proposing an alternative articulation of society that challenges the hierarchies of the nation-state.

#### **2.3.5 Culture**

The traditional culture of Nigeria's more than five hundred ethnic groups remains poorly-known<sup>8</sup>. The reference list includes some of the better-known anthropological monographs and surveys, but it is important to emphasise that many groups are recorded by only a single line in a reference book. Many of these accounts are very outdated and perhaps unhelpful in understanding modern developments. Culture is often represented by artificial dance performances or shunted to museums. Anthropology is not a

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<sup>6</sup> The Hausa newspaper, *Gaskiya ta fi Kwabo*, was often humorously compared to the Soviet *Pravda*, since its name has the same meaning.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Nnoli 1995:2-3

<sup>8</sup> The main inventories of the different cultures that make up Nigeria are Temple (1922), Talbot (1926), Wentelukas (1985) and the individual volumes of the Ethnographic Survey of Africa (Bradbury (1957), Forde (1950, 1951), Forde and Jones (1955), Gunn (1953, 1956), Gunn and Conant (1960).



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favoured subject at University level and few anthropological monographs have appeared in recent years from Nigerian, or indeed any, researchers. Nigeria is well-known internationally for its cultural artefacts, such as the Nok terracottas, the Ife heads and the Benin bronzes and these have been the subject of several international exhibitions. Despite this, the museum service is in disarray, with exhibits kept under poor conditions and theft of their holdings rife. Little effort is made to preserve major archaeological sites such as Birni Gazargamo, where illegal excavation is tacitly accepted. There is little dissemination of knowledge about this heritage in the schools, and universities are certainly not major driving forces in research into the rich cultures of Nigeria.

## **3. Ethnicity, language and culture within the broader political economy**

### **3.1 Ethnicity and governance**

Ethnicity has been a major factor in the path of Nigerian political development, with power almost exclusively in the hands of a few dominant groups. If minorities were to be empowered, this would inevitably create demand for greater transparency and more far-reaching changes in the political process. The gradual penetration of democratic institutions risks sabotaging traditional forms of social capital with very negative consequences for the poor. There is an overall tension therefore between the new, urban-based elites whose rise to power is underlain by access to financial resources but whose networks are strongly ethnically-based<sup>9</sup>.

One of the key structural elements of rural and some urban communities is the 'traditional ruler'. Many groups had some system of authority in the pre-colonial era, but the power of such chiefs was often weak. A classic ethnography of the Igbo is entitled 'The king in every man', a phrase emphasising the equal status of households in traditional society. In much of the Middle Belt, authority was vested in chief priests or earth-priests. The British required a structured system of chieftaincy and this was often created in contradistinction to the existing system. Thus the *Sarki*, *Hakimi*, *Mai Unguwar* titles common throughout much of the North have little historical depth and may run counter to the 'spiritual' authorities. Nonetheless, the role of these titleholders in tax collection and dispute settlement has wished them into existence and chiefs now have a very complex system of grading. The 'uplift' of a chief from Fourth Class to Third Class is a matter of jubilation and political campaign promises often revolve around chieftaincy creation. The creation of 'new' chiefs is an important sign of ethnic consolidation; a scattered, acephalous ethnic group has now created sufficient self-awareness and built up enough social capital to demand an officially recognised chief.

Despite this, traditional rulers remain important in popular affection, assuming they are seen to deal fairly. Government has increasingly attempted to interfere in the appointment process, but when, for example, in 1989, the then military government tried to put in place a highly unpopular businessman as Sultan of Sokoto there were mass popular protests. An Etsu Nupe at Bida was driven from his palace in the early 1990s as a result of perceived bad behaviour. Studies of 'traditional rulers' in Plateau State (most of whom are not really traditional at all) showed that most work extremely hard to prevent inter-group conflict during a period of increased civic stress (Blench et al. 2003).

### **3.2 Indigenes and settlers**

Objectively, the concept of 'indigenous' in Africa is a dangerous fiction in a continent with highly mobile populations. Nonetheless the notion of an 'indigene' has recently taken on strong political overtones in Nigeria. As a reaction to domination of education and employment by a few ethnic groups with powerful organisational skills, Nigeria has developed a quota policy in many areas of public life. University entrance, jobs in the civil service and passports are now subject to quotas, with a certain

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.gamji.com/NEWS1186.htm> for an interesting discussion of how the present elites control the agenda of newspapers.

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number of places reserved for the 'indigenous' population of particular states and local governments. To manage this system, individuals can apply for a certificate that they are indeed an indigene of a particular local government in order to apply for university places, for example. These certificates were first issued in the early 1990s and were at first non-informative. However, in more recent years they have been subject to rococo elaboration, with details of religion, language, tribe etc. all recorded. Some local governments have begun to distinguish between 'indigene' and 'settler', where 'settler' is anyone not liked by the dominant ethnic group. Thus Berom-dominated local governments in Plateau State have begun to refuse certificates to Fulbe and Hausa, even where these have been settled in the region for nearly a century. As a consequence, such excluded individuals have begun to apply for such certificates in more amenable states, such as Bauchi, despite the fact that they are demonstrably not indigenous to that state. The concept that only the resident farming population falls into the 'indigenous' category is spreading despite being manifestly contrary to provisions on the Nigerian constitution outlawing discrimination. Annex 3. provides a listing of nomadic pastoral and fishing populations that are typically affected by these categorisations.

One of the fictions by which Nigeria lives is that its political and administrative divisions are not based on ethnicity. In colonial times, especially in regions of high ethnic fragmentation, district and division boundaries were often based on the extension of particular ethnic groups and explicitly named for them. However, the secular and pan-Africanist ideology that dominated in the post-Independence era required a move away from such patterning to more inclusive structures which often split ethnic groups between administrative zones or implicitly handed power to minorities. Sometimes this was intentional, sometimes probably just a chance by-product of remote cartographers. The growth in power of local governments and the increasing articulacy of their residents have created a continuing state of friction that is little short of catastrophic for stable and effective management. At present, petitions fly thick and fast demanding the creation or redrawing of LGAs (Photo 1) while new districts are

**Photo 1. Local Government creation**



constantly being established that reflect ethnic groupings more precisely<sup>10</sup>. The consequence has been increasing numbers of districts, Local Governments and States<sup>11</sup> based on ethnicity, clan or similar social groupings<sup>12</sup>. This is probably more significant in Nigeria than other African countries, because resources of Local Government are principally distributed from the Federal Government and come from oil revenues rather than the tax base so there are varying but sometimes substantial sums to be allocated. Ironically, the constant amoeba-like division of administrative units reduces funds available to each individual unit. As a consequence, high transaction costs and the leaching of budgetary allocations to salaries has made Local Governments ever more unable to provide services.

### **3.3 Language: tool of cultural domination or essential tool for unity?**

Nigeria has a hierarchy of official languages; English is the national language, and is used for government business all over the Federation. A number of important regional languages, such as Hausa and Yoruba, are widely used in specific areas, and a third hierarchy of languages are those officially

<sup>10</sup> Ngu (1994) is a general analysis of the type of ethnicity inequity caused by boundary drawing that descends into documenting a particular plea of the Atakar people to be located in a new ethnically-based Zankan district.

<sup>11</sup> Some sort of watershed was passed when Edo State was created since it was the first state to be explicitly named after its dominant ethnic group.

<sup>12</sup> It was noted in Kebbi State in March 2003 that Local Governments were being declared unilaterally without the recognition of the Federal Government. Since no more revenue was made available, existing allocations were simply split between the new LGAs, ensuring that ever more funds were wasted on transaction costs. Similar reports have come from other states such as Bayelsa.

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designated for further redevelopment, some 22 at last count. Beyond this, the number of languages adopted for media broadcast and orthography development is significantly larger. Despite this, Nigeria has no language policy that is encapsulated in a single body of law. Instead any policy must be extracted from;

National Policy on Education	1977 rev. 1981
Cultural Policy for Nigeria	1988
Government views and comments on the Findings of the Recommendations of the Political Bureau	1987
Constitution(s) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria	1979, 1989, 1999

The relevant sections of the Constitution relating to language and culture are as follows (Box 4);

#### **Box 4. Constitutional<sup>13</sup> provisions relating to language and culture**

**18.** Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy;

**21.** The State shall -

- (a) protect, preserve and promote the Nigerian cultures which enhance human dignity and are consistent with the fundamental objectives as provided in this Chapter; and
- (b) encourage development of technological and scientific studies which enhance cultural values.

**55.** The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore.

It will be evident at one that these are of surpassing generality, that they do not commit the state any very concrete policies or actions. Although the Government will strive to eliminate illiteracy, it does not clarify in which language the child should be made literate. No specific provision deals with minority languages, and to date no consistent policy in this area has even been outlined.

The consequence has been that English has become the *de facto* language of communication, the language of broadcast media, schooling and increasingly the language of urban residents who have lost their maternal tongue, often as a consequence of marriages between individuals from different ethnic groups. The unsatisfactory nature of Nigerian television has given a major boost to the satellite providers and stations such as CNN have become major news providers in surprisingly remote areas. An interesting consequence of this is Nigerian English itself has developed quite distinctive forms, both in terms of the spoken language<sup>14</sup>.

Whether this is desirable is highly controversial. It is obviously desirable to have a language of national communication and a single language of government. It is of considerable significance in financial terms because of the economies of scale that follow from the large-scale printing of educational materials and government documents. Nonetheless, the spread of English also reflects the cultural deracination of urban populations and the civil consequences of that are clearly highly undesirable.

#### **4. The ethnicity dimension in Nigeria in historical perspective**

The ethnolinguistic fragmentation of Nigeria is extreme, even in comparison to neighbouring countries, and there is strong evidence that the picture today still represents a falling off from the diversity in pre-colonial times. The twentieth century saw both the assimilation many minority groups, a process that can be expected to continue, but also a demographic expansion of many very small groups to substantial populations.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm>

<sup>14</sup> A short list of references to publications on Nigerian English is given in the Bibliographies section

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A key element in the ethnic differentiation sharpened by the colonial ideology was the division of the country into North and South and 'Indirect rule' system in the North. Southern Nigeria was by and large colonised without substantial military effort, gradually overcome by missionaries and trading companies. The North, however, was conquered in a strictly military sense from 1900 onwards, and the two halves of Nigeria only united in 1914. Indirect rule meant effectively running the country through local rulers, the only strategy possible in a country with such a large population and a relatively small military presence. This in turn implied establishing the ambit of authority of existing rulers, and frankly developing hierarchical structures in confused or unstructured areas. This in turn became a key channel for the collection of taxes. This required ethnicity to be defined rather more closely than had previously been the case. Colonial policy was very much influenced by India, where officials compiled extensive catalogues of tribes and castes. From the 1920s onwards, the government was very exercised by the accumulation of ethnographic information, which was intended to be a tool of policy<sup>15</sup>. From the 1950s onwards this was accompanied by a programme to extend literacy in various regions of the North. One unintended effect of this was the evolution of 'Ethnic unions', institutionalised bodies that promoted the interests of particular ethnic groups. These began as early as 1916 and grew in size and importance until Independence in 1960<sup>16</sup>.

A policy of cataloguing division ran very much counter to the ideology of independent Nigeria, and for this reason, linguistic and ethnic surveys were discontinued by the state and not encouraged in the universities. Indeed, policy has remained divided on this issue; the rise of a notion of 'indigeneness' effectively recognising such divisions, but with government-controlled media and documents emphasising unity. Ethnicity is thus tacit in accounts of political divisions; although it is well known which ethnic bloc politicians represent, this is rarely openly discussed in the media<sup>17</sup>.

### **5. Political and social cleavages**

Although ethnicity and language represent a very primary cleavages, they are strongly linked to the adoption of specific world religions and thereby have significant implications for culture change. Although in principle, individuals are free to adopt what religion they like, in reality, particular ethnic groups tend to either adopt Islam or one species of Christianity. As a consequence, ethnic conflicts often become rewritten as religious conflicts, because this suits the agenda of urban elites. Religion has become a highly salient dividing feature in recent years. Except in Yorubaland, Christianity only began to make a serious impact on inland populations during the colonial era, and Islam, although probably crossing the desert in the early Middle Ages, only extended its reach to most minority populations at the same time. Traditional religion remains strong in many regions, albeit combined with a light dusting of Islam or Christianity. There is also little doubt that Islamic/Christian cleavages have been reinforced by external interests and that these have been seized on by internal elements to further essentially political rather than religious ends. For example, the conflicts in Zangon Kataf in 1992, were essentially between the indigenous people, the Tyap, and the Hausa traders who had been resident in the town since the nineteenth century. Old resentments about unequal access to resources and the relative wealth of the migrants came to a head in violent riots with loss of lives and property. However, this was soon interpreted as a religious conflict and in Kaduna there were further riots which had a Christian/Muslim character.

A declining respect for the older generation as well as the emergence of radical youth organisations in many ethnic groups is also changing the balance of political and economic power. All across the south and Middle Belt, 'Youth Organisations' have been formed and they are challenging the old order within their own society as well mobilising often violent attacks on wealth and privilege. Many of the kidnappings in the oil-bearing areas of the Delta, for example, have been led by organisations such as

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<sup>15</sup> This information was compiled in a series of dense reference tomes. See Temple (1919), Temple (1922), Talbot (1926), Meek (1925, 1931), Gunn (1953, 1956).

<sup>16</sup> See Ahanotu (1982) for a history of these Ethnic Unions.

<sup>17</sup> See Nnoli (1995) for an exhaustive (an exhausting) account of the history of ethnic politics in Nigeria, from the early colonial period to the mid-1990s.

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Egbesu Youths, explicitly ethnically-based organisations. Although these are often dressed up in the language of politics, they are often cynically interpreted as unemployed youth trying to seize money and power bypassing the usual channels. It is also true that the behaviour of elders often gives youth much to be sceptical about; the disappearance of funds (such as OMPADEC) intended for social development in the Niger Delta has been the source of considerable resentment.

It is probably true to say that there is no such entity as Nigerian ‘society’ in the sense that most democracies in the developed world would recognise. With the colonial period, the spread of Pidgin English in the south and Hausa in the north have created a certain unifying element; but it should be remembered that the majority of Nigerians do not speak the official national language, English, nor any of the major *linguae francae* to a degree that permits any transfer of complex political and social ideas. Similarly, social structures remain highly diverse, from the hierarchical, stratified societies typical of the Hausa and Kanuri areas, to the egalitarian, acephalous structures typical of the Igbo and many other southern and Middle Belt groups. Urban residents are often strikingly innocent as to the situation in the rural areas and are sometimes profoundly shocked when confronted with the reality of difference (Box 5).

**Box 5. Ambiguous attitudes: the strange story of the Koma**

Nigerians commonly accuse outsiders of presenting a falsified view of a ‘backward’ Nigeria; a view that may well have a grain of truth. Visitors *are* more likely to photograph picturesque village life than new buildings or Mercedes queuing in traffic jams in Abuja. Yet strangely, when Nigerians are confronted with a similar phenomenon in their own country, many of the same attitudes seem to surface. In 1985, reports began to appear in the Nigerian press of an isolated people, the Koma, living atop a mountain in the then Gongola state, wearing only leaves, and without access to infrastructure such as schools and health-care. Within time, the military governor of the State made the trek into the mountains and was abruptly reported as having ‘discovered’ the Koma. Within a short time, a flood of patronising articles began to appear in the newspapers and magazines, describing with horror the isolation of the Koma hills and the regrettable failure of the Koma to wear clothes. Much of this was surrounded by the sort of hypocritical prurience characteristic of tabloid journalism. At the same time, official Nigeria swung into gear. An expedition from the National Museum was mounted to the area (although no such expedition had ever been funded to document ethnography nearer to hand). Official allocations of funding were made for roads, schools and clinics. Scenarios were envisaged for building a tourist resort in the hills. The Koma were perceived as shaming the nation by their backwardness, and at the same time their nudity gave journalists a certain *frisson*.

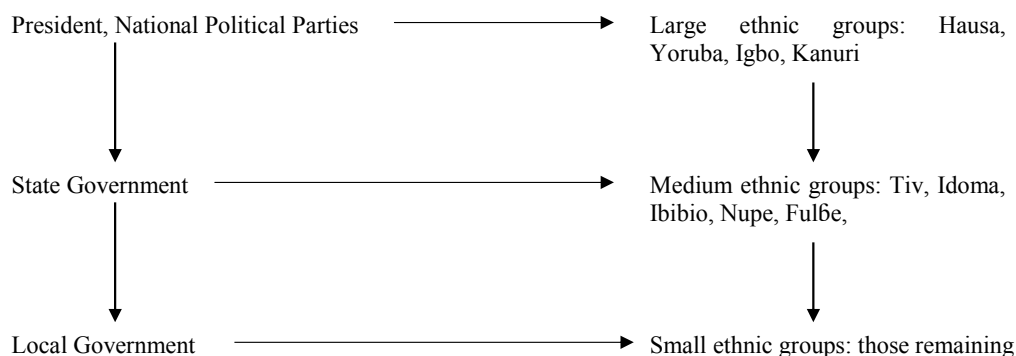
There were many ironies in the situation, although it is safe to say that irony and official Nigeria are uneasy fellow-travellers. The first was that, while it is true the Koma Hills are lacking in infrastructure, so are all the populations at the foot of the mountains. Unlike the Koma, they had been pleading for roads and schools. Secondly, unlike the surrounding peoples, an educated Koma had written and published a book about his people the previous year (Tantili 1984) making the Koma one of the better-documented groups in the area. Thirdly, all the Koma populations are also living on the Camerounian side and a large-scale interdisciplinary project to study their society had been mounted in the few previous years (see e.g. Dumas-Champion 1985). Needless to say, the funding for proposed roads and schools disappeared and today many Koma live in tranquil ignorance of the Nigerian state, their mountain fastness if anything less accessible than before from the Nigerian side.

## 6. Political and economic environment

### 6.1 Ethnic politics

Ethnicity is a major driver of political choice in Nigeria and much Nigerian political science is devoted to analysing this phenomenon<sup>18</sup>. Particularly at state and local government level, candidates who can bring in support from a major ethnic bloc have a much greater chance of success. Many political parties are perceived to represent particular ethnic interests, and even where this is not so, the fact that it is widely believed affects voters' choices. There is a strong correlation between the size of ethnic groups and level of government (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Levels of influence of ethnic groups**



The notion, well-founded or not, that there are three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, has had a powerful influence on the structure of politics, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as tripartite politics. This was previously associated with large administrative divisions known as North, West and East<sup>19</sup>, dating from 1939, corresponding to these three ethnic groups. Almost ever since politics has tried to find solutions that effectively balance the competing interests of these three 'regions'. Thus in the brief interludes of democracy that have punctuated Nigeria's long submission to military rule, potential presidential candidates have always tried to ensure that the vice-president is from a zone and ethnicity quite different from their own<sup>20</sup>.

Below the Federal level, the creation of boundaries of states and LGAs in turn has the effect of reifying ethnic divisions which might previously have been of limited significance. For example, the Igbo language is a large and complex chain of dialects that vary by region and clan. However, once a pocket of Igbo becomes isolated in a state where they are not the dominant ethnic group, their ethnicity is defined more sharply. Thus in Delta state, the three Igbo lects spoken there are treated as distinct languages characteristic of specific ethnic groups, the Enwani, Ndokwa and the Ika. This tends to encourage named groups to emphasise cultural difference and to play down their links with the larger Igbo community.

<sup>18</sup> The bibliography on this subject is immense and the stack further enlarged by articles almost every day in the Nigerian Press. Much of the literature goes rapidly out of date and it is often hard to follow older publications in part because of the number and variety of political groupings long since confined to the dustbin of history. The first penetrating study in this area is Temple (1918) who analysed the relationship between British colonial officials, traditional rulers and minority tribes and took a surprisingly modern view of the eventual end of colonial ruler. Diamond (1988) is a study in a more modern vein of the fall of the First Republic (1960-1966) which broke down after extensive squabbling between ethnically-based parties. Osaghae (1991) Ngu (1994) Nnoli (1995) Suberu (1996) and Ifeka (2000) all represent attempts to link minority discontent with the unresponsive nature of central government.

<sup>19</sup> It is from this era that the geographical description of Igboland as 'The East' appears to derive. Geographically speaking, Igboland is in the south-central part of Nigeria, but it is always referred to as 'The East'.

<sup>20</sup> See Nnoli (1995:31) for a description of how this works.

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There has always been a significant fear that minorities would be swamped by dominant ethnic groups, a fear expressed as soon as nascent political activity began in the 1950s. As a consequence, the colonial authorities commissioned Sir Henry Willinck to report on the issue and make recommendations to counter any such trend<sup>21</sup>. This report is a key document in many ways, for it is where the obsession with new boundaries remedying ethnic and religious discrimination first surfaces. Many of the witnesses interviewed by the commission, argued for boundary adjustments, new states etc. in order to avoid these patterns of dominance. In various forms, this pattern has continued up until the present and it is hardly an accident that an apparently outdated document such as this should be republished in 2002.

## **6.2 Ethnicity and employment**

Nigeria has traditionally had a 'blind' attitude to ethnicity as far as Federal structures are concerned. Federal officers were supposed to be posted anywhere in the country and to be impartial in their work. University Vice-chancellors were often from areas very remote from the location of the University. Curiously, the larger churches have taken a similar view; that pastors are men of God and can work with any community. As a consequence the churches operated in *linguae francae* such as Hausa and English, somewhat to the dissatisfaction of congregations. The unlooked-for consequence of this is the creation of many smaller, independent churches with a specific ethnic and linguistic base.

The reverse, however, is true at state and local government level, where employment is strongly linked to ethnicity. A perception that the Federal system had reinforced major inequities in, for example, employment, is now being addressed by a concept of indigenism, which is itself discriminatory. However, the informal economy of Nigeria is driven by ethnicity, with particular trades and jobs dominated by specific ethnic groups and access to credit being consequently restricted. Such anti-meritocratic procedures must be weighed against the positive social capital that ensures trust in, for example, long-distance trade<sup>22</sup>.

## **6.3 Hometown and Community Development associations**

One of the most characteristic features of the Nigerian scene are ethnic or regionally based associations, formed to promote the development of the home community. In the larger ethnic groups, such as the Yoruba and Igbo, each major subgroup or clan forms its own association<sup>23</sup>. Among smaller populations, these ethnic unions encompass all the members of the ethnic group. Similarly, hometown associations tend to consist of members who live outside their home area, and indeed may only visit it rarely. Such associations also exist outside Nigeria, and where the expatriate community is sufficiently large even reproduce divisions in the community. In London, for example, two rival Ijò associations exist, reflecting the dichotomy of the Eastern and Western Delta. Even though the majority of the members of these associations no longer speak the Ijò language, such rivalries increase in intensity as their logic is undermined.

By contrast, the Community Development Associations (CDAs) typical of the Middle Belt and other zones of high ethnic fragmentation include both local and external members, which represents an important shift of emphasis. External hometown associations are about the manufacture of identity in the amorphous context of the city. Members of a CDA are usually secure in their identity, and are creating tools to mobilise communities for development, in particular by putting pressure on members of the same ethnic group in positions of influence. CDAs have external goals such as infrastructure, with roads and electricity being most prominent. The most important tool of the CDA is the almanac; a wall-poster that contains a calendar but is devoted to photographs of prominent members of the community, their exact

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<sup>21</sup> The original report was published by HMSO in 1958, and has been republished in Nigeria by the League for Human Rights in 2002.

<sup>22</sup> See Cohen (1965) for a description of the networks that support the long-distance cattle trade.

<sup>23</sup> Honey & Okafor (1998) provide a useful overview of hometown associations in Nigeria, while Trager (2001) is a study of a particular set of associations, those of the Ijèṣa Yoruba.

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size and placement a reflection of local micro-politics. Despite the ethnic headline, CDAs very often do little or nothing to promote language and culture and may even hold their meetings in the dominant lingua franca as a concession to urban members.

The pattern is rather different in the Hausa areas. The region of reference is the Emirate, which sometimes corresponds to a political/ administrative unit, for example, Kano and Katsina. In these areas, a 'Fund' [H. *gidauniya*] is established, usually by extremely wealthy elites. Although in theory all levels of society can contribute, in practice the vast majority of funds are from these elites. The money is then used for local development projects, submitted by local committees throughout the Emirate. Presumably because of the ideology of Islam there is much less linkage to a specific clan or town. Moreover, not all Emirates have such funds; smaller Emirates like Hadejia and Gumel do not.

#### **6.4 'Ethnoethnography': the promotion of local culture**

A consequence of rising literacy and a more-or-less formed perception of the impact of globalisation on local cultures has been to stimulate a need for indigenous ethnography. The classical transmission of cultural knowledge through oral modes is considered to be breaking down and an inchoate feeling that the past ought to be recorded is growing. Written models are widespread in the dominant cultures; for smaller ethnic groups to compete in the social and cultural arena, historico-ethnographic accounts are much in demand. Such accounts are not produced in the pursuit of disinterested scholarship; there are current political realities to address. However, these accounts strongly challenge current western academic practice by providing an ethnography more responsive to local needs. Anthropologists may feel able to dismiss this material for its lack of theoretical sophistication, but those who remain concerned with the local should feel challenged by the failure of the discipline to address local needs. Hence the rise of the local ethnography; small books that describe the culture and history of particular groups in a very straightforward way, but often promoting a rather specific political agenda<sup>24</sup>. Such books are also aspirational, recounting the migration of some particular tribe from Egypt, for example, but also editing out concerns that are perceived as 'not modern' such as much of traditional religion or witchcraft beliefs. They reflect in an important way the dissatisfaction felt with standard anthropological monographs, with their wayward language and sometimes ephemeral theoretical preoccupations. An additional bibliography of these books and pamphlets is included.

#### **6.5 'Cultural dancing' the restructuring of culture by the state**

Culture is almost by definition unruly, diverse and contains elements that challenge the worldview of the ruling elite. It may be inappropriate dress, exhibitions of sexuality, adherence to religions other than the standard-issue global forms, or even musical scales that run counter to the drool emitted by FM radio stations. The vision of the Nigerian state, which seems to have been adopted wholesale from the former Soviet Union, is for a society where all these elements are tamed. Culture is seen as something to be restructured until it is unthreatening, perhaps picturesque, but conformity with urban values. One of the most pervasive manifestations of this is 'cultural dancing', omnipresent at a broad range of ceremonies, shows, competitions and embedded in the school system. Usually one the most anodyne dances or masquerades is selected from a range of village performances and tidied up so that it can be given as a three-minute glimpse in some arena in front of dignitaries. The dancers usually have highly untraditional costumes and increasingly use modern westernised musical instruments. Honour is satisfied; the state makes its nod to diversity while not actually accepting the presentation of that diversity.

Much the same is true in other arenas such as crafts. Nigerian crafts are highly diverse and extremely rich and could be the source of considerable income in the remote areas where the skills and materials are still

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<sup>24</sup> A rather fine example of this is the successive editions of the 'History of Benin' by Jacob Egharevba. First published in 1931, the latest edition seem to be 1968. During nearly forty years the 'traditional history' of Benin was constantly revised so that it should reflect current political reality (Eisenhofer 1998).



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present. But far from encouraging such craft skills, poor quality imitations are available in major population centres, usually made by urban residents and these have the effect both of discouraging more skilled craftsmen and ensuring that the country as a whole is known for mediocre production. Again, the example of Cameroun, where it is possible to buy high-quality copies of traditional artefacts such as masks, baskets and musical instruments shows that this state of affairs is not inevitable.

Other more dramatic social changes have occurred as a consequence of their unacceptability to a wider world. Throughout Southern Zaria and the Mada Hills area, many ethnic groups practised 'secondary marriage', a form of marriage which allowed some women to have multiple husbands<sup>25</sup>. This form of polygyny, better known from Tibet, shocked early administrators and missionaries and they began a campaign to eliminate it. Although these systems persisted well into the 1970s, as education and Christianity spread in the region, it was increasingly felt that this was 'not modern' and the practice has gradually been dropped. Given that *polygamy* is still widespread and culturally approved, the illogicality of this position is evident; but beliefs about culture are not driven by logic.

### **6.6 Heritage: conserving and developing historical and archaeological sites**

African countries are relatively poor in archaeological sites compared with other continents, but with the exception of Great Zimbabwe, few in Sub-Saharan Africa are given the conservation attention they merit. Similarly, museums do not figure highly on a national list of priorities and even substantial institutions established in the colonial era are now underfunded, with collections damaged by variable conservation conditions and intermittent theft<sup>26</sup>. The Museum of Traditional Nigeria Architecture (MOTNA) established at Jos Museum to illustrate the variety and impressive technologies of mud-built architecture in various parts of the Republic has collapsed and much of the land on which it stood sold off for gardens<sup>27</sup>. With a few exceptions, buildings from the colonial period and distinctive styles such as the Afro-Brazilian buildings have been knocked down or substantially altered. Nigeria has a single World Heritage site, the Sukur landscape, a remarkable stone-built town on the Nigeria-Cameroun border. It is safe to say that few Nigerians have heard of Sukur and even fewer have visited it; its very anonymity probably protects it. Nigerian terracotta artefacts pillaged from illicit archaeological digs regularly appear on the art market in Brussels and New York<sup>28</sup>. There have been calls for a more effective security system both in museums and at outdoor sites for more than a decade, but no action has been taken<sup>29</sup>.

Nigeria has a Directorate of Museums and Monuments under which the recording of monuments falls<sup>30</sup>. This is headed by a Director, under whom there are other professionals. There is a list of 67 declared National Monuments, which have been properly documented to aid research and interpretation and a list of archaeological heritage sites. The National Commission for Museums and Monuments in 1993 began a nationwide survey and documentation of sites in Nigeria with the ultimate aim of producing an archaeological map of the country to stimulate archaeological and conservation activities.

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<sup>25</sup> See Smith (1953) for a description of this practice.

<sup>26</sup> It was highly notable that the prestigious exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1999 of 'Africa: Art of a continent' was somewhat marred by the exhibition of a number of items 'from private collections' that had been stolen from Nigerian Museums and had to be hastily withdrawn when this was realised (Shaw 1999).

<sup>27</sup> The buildings that formerly existed at MOTNA are documented in three large-format volumes (Dmochowski 1990a,b,c) originally intended to be a guide to conservation and restoration but which has now become a requiem for this type of mud architecture.

<sup>28</sup> See Brodie (2000) for an up-to-date account of 'red alert' in Nigeria in relation to stolen antiquities and Darling (2000) on the loss of Sokoto and Nok terracottas. Jegede (1996) represents an overview from a Nigerian point of view. Somewhat bizarrely, the Museum Service has given its imprimatur to a recent book which publishes many ancient terracotta figurines which clearly did not leave the country by the conventional channels (De Grunne 1998).

<sup>29</sup> Ekechukwu (1990) discusses the loss of Nigerian heritage and makes proposals for improved security systems. Elutemi (2002) lists some of the more important cultural artefacts that have been looted from Nigerian cultural sites in recent years.

<sup>30</sup> Adapted from <http://www.icrom.org/africa2009/common/papers/2001/h-nigeria01.pdf>

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At the local level there is definitely some concern about the loss of 'cultural resources' and a feeling that these should be better protected and promoted. In the Ijeṣa area of SW Nigeria, for example, there has been a move to inventory and list local buildings of interest<sup>31</sup>. Other local initiatives in different regions to fence cultural sites suggest that there is a motivation which could be built upon. Nonetheless, it is clear that the laissez-faire attitude of the state is allowing Nigeria's cultural heritage to disappear at an alarming rate. As tourism is presently insignificant in providing employment due to insecurity and the hostile or indifferent attitude of the state, this has no direct impact on the poor. However, other African countries, particularly in Eastern and Southern Africa, have demonstrated that 'pro-poor' tourism is a valid concept and a revitalised approach could have a considerable, if localised impact on the poverty reduction in specific areas.

## **7. Significance for pro-poor change**

### **7.1 Ethnicity and social capital**

Ethnicity, and sub-ethnic units such as the clan and hometown, are major sources of recruitment for CBOs throughout Nigeria and an important mobilising force in developing social capital. CBOs formed on this basis are probably more coherent and resilient than many other structures. However, they are not necessarily pro-poor and may actually exacerbate social divisions in some cases. Increasing self-awareness among minorities has begun to play an important role in demands for equitable resource sharing and is acting to even out blatant inequalities such as infrastructure provision. Thus the unending demands for new local governments (§3.2) can have many interpretations. At one level they simply shift elite capture downwards to an increasingly local stratum. At another, they dissipate what money is available for development in ever higher transaction costs. But, by being ever more closely aligned with ethnicity, they also put more power in the hands of the poor than before, since they are able to influence councillors via kinship as well as through the ballot box.

### **7.2 Educational and media systems**

Educational and media systems in Nigeria are in disarray in terms of policy towards indigenous languages with teaching materials being ineffective, inappropriate and in short supply. Better communication in excluded areas would undoubtedly make a major contribution to improved standards and health and agricultural production. In addition, more structured policies towards ethnic diversity could reduce the incidence of ethnic conflict and lead to more equitable resource-sharing.

In many African countries, governments are permitting the establishment of minority-oriented FM stations, and most of these have been a resounding success, binding together communities in a way that is never possible with literacy programmes<sup>32</sup>. Such programmes also represent a risk for government since it is much less easy to control output; but political risk is an inevitable consequence of decentralisation and greater transparency, a risk worth taking. Nigeria, with its strong centralising tendencies, has not been awarding licenses for vernacular FM stations and broadcasts in minority languages almost invariably consist of direct translations of government news broadcasts. Proposals by external donors to support programming that would promote accountability, transparency and greater democratic values, are usually met with the requirement that scripts be first censored.

By a curious paradox, the declining value of the Naira has made local publishing industries significantly more competitive. Books published outside Nigeria are now very expensive and only available to urban elites. Local publishers therefore an advantage and they are making use of it to produce local interest

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<sup>31</sup> See Agbaje-Williams & Ogundiran (1992) for documentation of local efforts in this area. Eboreime (2003) discusses the conflicts that have arisen between legal provisions and local practice in relation of the Kingdom of Benin.

<sup>32</sup> The impact of DFID-funded programmes on agricultural extension topics in vernacular languages of Northern Ghana are discussed in Chapman et al. (2003)

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materials. Many of these are textbooks, and political biographies are also popular, but local ethnography and records of oral history have also increased in numbers (§6.4). These publications play a key role in increasing social capital and decentralisation, emphasising the local at the expense of the national and global.

**7.3 Forces driving pro-poor change**

Nigerian government policies are not pro-poor, whatever the rhetoric, and the simple demonstration of this is that despite the enormous wealth of the country as a whole, life in both remote rural areas and neglected areas of towns continues to deteriorate. Roads that were built a decade ago have collapsed and are not maintained, schools have fallen down, clinics are no longer staffed. If there are forces driving pro-poor change, these arise from factors outside government control or are unintended consequences of its policies. A summary of such forces is shown in (Table 3). A simplified summary of likely impact on pro-poor change is given in the +/- column.

**Table 3. Forces driving pro-poor change and their impact**

<b>Forces driving change</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>+/-</b>
Globalisation and ethnic pluralism sharpening perceptions of ethnicity	Increased conflict and inequitable allocation of resources	-
Collapse in the education sector	Higher proportion of adults with low or no literacy skills	-
Improved communications technology	Increased ‘digital divide’ with worldwide networking available to urban elites. Little effort to decentralise information access through vernacular materials	-
Declining value of the Naira	Has made local publishing industries significantly more competitive and has stimulated production of local interest materials	+
Ethnicity an increasing force for building social capital	Distrust of government has created much greater emphasis on self-help and has stimulated community initiatives, CBOs etc.	+

In the light of the preliminary analysis of Drivers of Change, Table 4 interprets the ethnicity dimension in terms of the key structural factors leading to pro-poor change;

**Table 4. The ethnicity/language dimension and key structural factors**

	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	
<b>Current / potential impact on key structural issues</b>	Overall poverty reduction	L	H
	Strengthened accountability	M	M
	Pro-poor government expenditure	L	H
	Pro-poor growth	L	H
<b>Time-frame</b>	Short-term	M	
	Medium-term	M	
	Long-term	H	
	Current Contribution to Positive Change	M	
	Impact of Negative Change	L	

A = Actual P = Potential L = Limited; M = Moderate; H = High

**8. Conclusions**

Language, ethnicity and culture form a triad that has an increasingly powerful impact on the political economy of Nigeria. They determine the allocation of resources in many arenas and can conversely become a tool of social exclusion. In particular, the large numbers of people in rural communities that are monolingual are excluded by media and educational systems that take no account of their cultural and linguistic background. Constitutional provisions and government policy are so general as to ensure that government has no concrete obligations to its citizens in this area. As a consequence, government action

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is unfocused and often left to the prejudices of individual officials. A more proactive policy would be able to harness the extensive social capital implicit in ethnolinguistic solidarity and reduce its potential for social exclusion.

Donor involvement in these areas has been slight at best. Although funding has gone into education, the literacy goals of the Nigerian educational system have hardly been questioned. Despite the pro-poor emphasis of recent years, the link between vulnerability, remoteness and minority languages is hardly ever made, presumably because Nigerian consultants are almost invariably from dominant ethnic groups<sup>33</sup>. Donors have become more interested in conflict issues, but as their concerns do not usually include ethnolinguistic issues, conflict resolution programmes often have a rather wayward focus.

## **9. Recommendations: follow-up**

Follow-up studies

It is clear that there is a significant gap between Federal Government policy on language and the situation on the ground in individual states. It is therefore recommended that more detailed studies are undertaken to;

- a. Establish what languages are used in education and what teaching materials are available
- b. Establish what languages are used in broadcast media and how decisions are made as to the extent and content of broadcasts
- c. Establish what CBOs, NGOs and other institutions exist to study and promote vernacular language use
- d. Inventory donor, missionary and other internationally funded projects linked to language and cultural heritage
- e. Use GIS systems combined with language maps to explore the relationship between speech-communities and social exclusion
- f. Explore the outlines of a pro-poor policy in this dimension

One of the goals of the Drivers of Change programme and indeed many other donor initiatives is to consult more widely. However, in reality, little consultation takes place with the large proportion of the population that cannot express their views in English. It is important to recognise that where individuals have a passive knowledge of a second language such as Hausa, *this does not mean they can express their views freely in that language*. A wider programme of interviews using Digital Video and a collation of materials on VCDs and DVDs in different languages would provide an important tool in both communicating views from outside to donors and government officials and providing feedback to the community.

Recommendations for donor action are as follows;

- ❖ Assist government with documentation of language situation in Nigeria as basis for more informed policy decisions
- ❖ Assist media organisations to develop communication tools in multiple languages
- ❖ Assist CBOs with cultural and linguistic agendas to take more effective advocacy positions
- ❖ Develop programme of digital video to increase participation in decision-making processes

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<sup>33</sup> This is one of the most problematic aspects of the local consultancy companies in Nigeria; they are almost entirely staffed by members of a very few ethnic groups, almost all of those southern. As a consequence, they are largely unfamiliar with many of the remoter areas of the country and certainly do not emphasise problems experienced by ethnolinguistic minorities. This is not specific to Nigeria, of course, a similar blindness is typical of many countries in the developed world.

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The references are divided into sub-bibliographies for ease of consultation.

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