

Perspectives on culture



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Discussing different cultures Culture refers to the behaviors, beliefs, values, attitudes and material objects that are uniquely learned and shared by a particular group of people or a society and passed on from older members of a community to younger members. These attributes can be used to characterize them or differentiate them from other societies. Society on the other hand can be defined as a group of people who have lived and worked together for a long period of time and have become an organized population forming a social unit.

In a country comprising over forty two different societies, widely grouped into Nilotic, Bantus and Cushitic, cultural diversity is widely evident in day-to-day life . Different cultures are accompanied by unique customs and norms, some surprising and shocking while others are common to all the cultures. Norms refer to particular rules concerning right and wrong in a society while customs are the society's practices (Tierney, 2007).

Many elements of culture and diversity such as aesthetics, ceremony, ethics, health and medicine, gender roles, folk myths, religion and spirituality, gestures, grooming, sexuality, taboos and ownership differ among societies. Gender roles, for example, differ greatly among these societies. The Maasai- a Nilotic tribe mainly comprising nomadic pastoralists, surprisingly assign the role of building houses and cooking to women in their community whereas men are expected to protect the community and look after livestock. This is not the case with the kikuyu (a Bantu community) or luo (Nilotic) and many other cultures where houses are built by men.

Religion and Spirituality, including purpose in life, the possibility and type of afterlife also has great diversity among various societies. Each society has a unique ' god' that they worship and believe in. The gods have different

names and are believed to reside in specific places where they can be worshiped and consulted at specific times. The kikuyu community for example believes their god-ngai, lives a mountain so they face this specific mountain during worship.

Another surprising variation in element of culture among the Maasai is evident in their status- attitudes and behaviors related to people of different rank like age, wealth, office or fame. This community considers keeping more livestock and having more children a sign of wealth, the more a person has the wealthier he is. Living among these communities requires knowledge of their language and acclimatize to their food. Language is a set of shared symbols that enables communication among people.

Laws refer to formal rules concerning behavior that are clearly defined by a political authority that has the task of enforcing them whereas sanctions can be defined as rewards for appropriate behavior or penalties imposed on someone for inappropriate behavior(De, 1994). It is not surprising that most cultures shared almost similar attributes concerning laws and sanction imposed on lawbreakers. In all society, laws and sanctions play a major part in maintaining values (principles used by members of a culture to define what is morally right or wrong, good or bad, , desirable or undesirable proper or improper, beautiful or ugly.)

The Maasai society particularly continues to strongly value and greatly uphold their culture showing strong ethnocentrism. This refers to the idea that one's culture and way of life are superior to those of other societies.

From this experience with various cultures, it's important to note that some elements of culture have positive impact on a society and should be greatly

upheld whereas others are destructive.

References

Tierney, S. (2007). *Accommodating cultural diversity*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

De, V. R. A. (1994). *Cultural diversity in schools: From rhetoric to practice*.

Albany: State Univ. of New York Press.