

Bridging cultural differences

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WAYS ON HOW TO BRIDGE CULTURAL AND ETHNICAL DIFFERENCES. The world constitutes people with different cultural and ethnic background. Culture refers to the beliefs, ideas, artifacts that make up a shared way of life while ethnicity refers to a shared cultural heritage (Macdonis, 2007 page 60). Now when people differ in cultural and ethnic background there tend to be a gap or conflict between them. For This reason, there must be some ways of bridging this gap.

Thus the essay outlines these differences and the ways on how to bridge them. To begin with, cultural difference is the distinction existing between cultures and it is also called cultural conflict. On the other hand, ethnic difference refers to the difference in cultural heritage that is to say members of an ethnic category have common ancestors, language or religion that together confer a distinctive social identity (Macdonis 2007 page 335). If people differ in some aspects of their culture are said to be in ethnic conflict.

For instance, cultures and ethnic groups may differ in language, religion, marriage, food habits and dressing. To clarify on these differences, let us first look at language and symbols. Language refers to the method of human communication, either spoken or written consisting of the use of words in structured and conventional way (Google. Merriam Webster). It plays a great role in interaction between two persons, it helps to share thoughts, emotions and opinions, and it develops communities and knowledge.

Basically, language and symbols intermarry in the way that a symbol is something representing an idea, a process and physical entities. As a result, people of the same language live in harmony because they are able to

communicate. For example, beating of a drum have different meanings according to the area it is done, for instance among the Chewa in the central region it means an invitation to bear in that area, while to other people of Nthalire in Chitipa it may mean something else. The second cultural and ethnic difference between cultures is religion.

This refers to a belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power especially a person, God and gods. Beliefs differ according to cultures and ethnic background that is why there are a lot of religions in the world. Just to mention a few, people from the Middle East believed in Allah while a white man believed in God and in Jesus Christ. This is because the founders of their faith were different; Jesus was a Jew and Muhammad an Arabian. Muslims vehemently deny that Jesus is a son of God which is against Christians' belief. In this situation people of these two religions will always be in conflict if no ways are put to bridge their faith. The other cultural and ethnical difference existing between cultures is marriage, which refers to a formal union of a man and a woman, typically recognised by law, by which they become husband and wife (google, Merriam-webster). As a result of differing in ethnic background and culture people in Malawi practices different kinds of marriages based on the region they belong.

People of the north and southern end practices patrilineal type of marriage while the remaining part practices matrilineal type of marriage. Patrilineal is normal in the regions being practiced while to others is not normal just because it involves paying of a huge amount of money to the parents as a part of thankful token in which to the other groups is like buying. Food habits also

plays a role in differing cultures and ethnic groups, a good example can be on the main meals that people value.

A Malawian citizen may find it difficult to accommodate rice in his daily meals which he may call it junky. This is so because in Malawian culture we value thick porridge (Nsima). The other example can be of Indians, they value putting much pepper in their food in which other people can not manage. The last difference is dressing, dressing may differ because of religion, cultural background and the environment in the individual resides.

The putting on of trousers is deviance in other cultures which is also normal to other cultures. Muslim women are encouraged to be putting on long dresses even covering their faces. Following these differences further, we really see a need of bridging these cultures and some of these ways may include; education, democratic decision making policies, religion, national festivals, village transfers. Firstly, cultural and ethnic differences can be bridged through awareness.

This can be achieved through education, involving agents of change such as traditional readers. Agents of change who are regarded as key people, should be trained on the other cultures and taught to relay the message to their people. Secondly, syllabi covering information of all the cultures and ethnic groups should be implemented in the curriculum. This will enable students to know more of different cultures and as they grow will be able to interact with those with differing cultures.

In addition to that, the government must implement democratic decision making policies. In support of this point, policy makers should institute the

value of mixing people of different cultures in government institutions such as the army, police, universities, secondary schools and others. A good example of this policy can be under the late D. R Banda who introduced the Malawi institute of young pioneers, which was constituting young people from different angles of the country to be trained at a one centre.

This in turn yielded intermarriage just because youth could leave together for a long and understand each other. Furthermore, religion can also help to bring together people of differing cultures in one. For example churches, mosques and other worship centres consist people of different cultures and ethnic groups, to shed more lights on this point let us have an example of St Michaels and All Angels C. C. A. P. People from all the regions of the country sharing seats, pastor and work together regardless of their cultural gap.

Not only does religion bring together different cultures only in this way, we can also look in the situations of national crisis, national celebrations, people of different faith may come together to ask for God's favor. A good example can be drawn from this year's national independent day where by prayers were conducted on sixth July 2012 at Comesa hall in Blantyre. Leaders from all denominations together with the leader of the country came together merged to pray for the national economic crisis. This leads us to conclusion that we