
PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF CULTURAL EVENTS MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The term "Events" refer to a planned public or social occasion, a special activity, celebration or notable happening of historical or cultural value. It doesn't just happen. Someone must make events happen. Cultural events therefore designate those special activities in the culture, arts and heritage sector like festivals, carnivals, durbar, film premieres, theatre performances, exhibitions, tours, command performances or even seminars, workshops, and gala -nights. For the purpose of our discussion here, we shall concentrate more on managing cultural festivals or similar special events within the culture sector. The approach adopted here is carefully chosen to afford me opportunity to share highlights of my experiences as creative consultant to many local and international festivals and indeed my recent engagements as Managing Consultant to the Nasarawa State Government on Culture (2008- to date); and as Festival Director (2013- to date) currently repositioning the traditional Nzeh Mada Festival into an international tourist event.

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INTRODUCTION

The planning of cultural events in traditional African societies differed from community to community. However the challenges and basic features were similar. The age grades system functioned as the basic unit of operation in the organization of such events. The planning of traditional festivals, for instance, began with a proposal on the date by the family, guild, or whoever is the traditional custodian of the event to the community head or council of elders. Once the leadership of the community deliberates on the proposal, the chief priest is invited to secure the acceptance and blessing of the approved date by the ancestral spirits. Thereafter, the chief priest prepares the community for the festival by performing all necessary rites. The publicity of the event is done by word of mouth and in some cases, emissaries were sent with traditional tokens to the neighboring communities. The lighting and decoration of the event venue were done using natural sources and resources found within the vicinity of the community.

Audience engineering did not pose much challenge, as most times attendance of cultural events was obligatory for most members of the traditional African societies.

CULTURAL EVENTS MANAGEMENT:

Emerging Challenges

The organization pattern and management of most festivals and community cultural events has continued over the years, often with minimal modifications. However, as African societies began tilting towards modern tastes, human life became more complex. The nature of modern human communication and socialization has radically been transformed by the widening the chasm between the rich and the poor, the city and the villages, invention of the modern mass media as well as the massive technological advancements that have shrunk the world into a global village. The taste and expectations of the average African attending an event has been expanded beyond what his pre-colonial traditional entertainment forms and events packaging in their native forms can offer.

Furthermore, in the last few decades, the rising cost of living, global economic uncertainties and pervasive poverty have connived to further marginalize the average man. Consequently, majority of the population is today grappling with the challenges of managing the meager funds available to individuals and families to spend vis-à-vis the high cost of transportation, health care and education. Most families now have fewer resources to deploy to entertainment and leisure activities. Faced with such limitations, the hitherto teeming participants in most cultural events have become more selective and sophisticated in their choices, tastes and propensity to respond to events invitations.

The above situation has underscored the need for more effective and efficient management of resources available to plan and execute cultural events. The creativity of the average event planner is highly tasked since he has to compete for attention of the target participants for his event with many other choices from which they have to decide. He needs to be more circumspect, if he has to realize the objectives of his event and guarantee its proper attendance by the target participants. This paper shall identify some of the salient points cultural events planners must consider in ensuring successful management of their events.

Cardinal Considerations in Modern Cultural Events Management

Management is the process of organizing & controlling human and material resources of an organization or group to achieve predetermined goals. In broad terms, it is concerned with the efficient and effective planning as well as regulation of activities of an enterprise. Management responsibilities revolve around five critical functions: Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing and Controlling. In practice, these functions are intertwined as shown in the diagram below.

In ensuring the effective management of cultural events, the following are what I consider some of the core principles.

- i. **Safety and comfort of Participants:** The primary responsibility of any event planner is to provide a secure venue and atmosphere for the event. Having invited the different categories of participants out from their safe closets to a venue you have chosen, they expect you to in turn take all necessary steps to ensure that they are not only safe but also comfortable all through the event. The event planner must therefore think safety and comfort at all times. Security of both the human and material resources mobilized to the event venue is paramount. This subsumes paying attention to details like the choice of venue, timing of the event, types of seats to be used, parking spaces, refreshments to be served and the overall ambience of the event, safety must be the guiding principle.
- ii. **Satisfaction of stakeholders:** The success of any event is measured, inter alia, by the satisfaction of the stakeholders. These range from the investor, vendors, and employees, down to the ordinary spectator who has been invited to participate in the cultural event. As event planner, anticipate the expectations of each stakeholder and ensure each segment of your stakeholders has something to take-away from the event.
- iii. **Welfare of talents and volunteers:** Ensure that the welfare of your talents and volunteers are adequately catered for. Talents are artistes or other professionals whose skills are needed to service your event. The volunteers on the other hand are the adhoc staff you may mobilize to support the execution of different activities you have planned for the event.
- iv. **Timelines:** As event planner, setting and respecting timelines is another fundamental skill you must develop. Activities and deliverables should be tied to clearly determined time-frames.
- v. **Sensitivity to details:** you need to pay attention to the minutest details if your event will achieve its desired goals. Keeping a checklist of all that needs to be executed with their timeframes is helpful in this regard.

Qualities of an Effective Cultural Events Planner

- i. effective leadership skills
- ii. have a trained eye for details
- iii. set and observe timelines as strict as possible
- iv. be an efficient cost manager
- v. ability to network and raise money
- vi. media relations experience
- vii. event planning experience

TOOLS FOR CULTURAL EVENTS MANAGEMENT

1. **Establish your event objectives and possibly evolve a Vision Statement (for festivals):** This is a mental exercise that entails deciding on the Who, what, when and why of your event or festival. As a guide, I have found the following tools useful in managing my events:
 - a. Flow charts and graphs for scheduling agenda.
 - b. Detailed schedules and setting up of guides.
 - c. Policy Statement which will provide direction for all support staff and units
2. **Identify the Community infrastructure needed:** like number of volunteers, vehicles, public square etc.
3. **Design appropriate content for your Event:** decide in good time what activities will be featured during your cultural event and their possible venue. The design of such content should also be guided by the need to cater for the varying interests of the different age brackets and gender segmentation of your participants within the overall objectives of the festival. In the redesigning of the Nzeh Mada Festival 2014, which held in Akwanga, Nasarawa State, for instance, we made provision for seven core activities which were targeted at the children, youth and adult population of the society. These include: the Children Mada Language quiz and debate competition; Bwar Mada (Carnival/Street Performance); Nzeh Mada Colloquium; Fir Nyu Gyough (Easter greetings and royal blessings from the Chun Mada to the Mada nation); Miss Nzeh Mada pageant; Ro Mada (Cultural Parade), Exhibition of Mada Heritage & Arts; Ri-Lah (Mada Traditional Cuisine Competition). Each of these activities is targeted at different segment of the population.
4. **Merchandising and promotion of the festival:** in this case always remember that you need to create avenues or environment for vendors to participate in your event profitably. Provide good experience for the visitors. Also acquaint yourself with the various marketing tools: (sales promotion, publicity, Public Relations, personal selling, direct marketing and interactive media) My experience suggests that the impact and credibility of free publicity is better than advertising
5. **Identify and woo potential sponsors.** In the last few decades, sports enjoyed a wider appeal to most sponsors than cultural events. However in the last two decades, some sponsors have tried to diversify into arts and festivals partly because of either of the following factors:
 - Economic changes
 - Ability to target market segments
 - Ability to measure results
 - Fragmentation of the media
 - Growth of diverse population segments.

In order to secure the interest of your potential sponsors you need to ponder on the following and provide good responses to each question

- Does your event fit the company's sales, products etc.?
 - Companies appeal to particular internal and external audiences. Have you mapped and determined the appeals and goals of your potential sponsor?
 - Provide the sponsor promotional ideas that meet their corporate goals. It's your duty to ensure your potential sponsor sees, from your proposal, how he or his organization can get his or its money's worth by investing in your event.
 - What is the result of the research you have done to establish the company's goal(s) and ascertain the competitors of your potential sponsors.
6. Media coverage for the festival. Call attention to your event via press conferences and press releases. Try to understand what the reporter wants from the field and create it within your event e.g. Atlanta city by 1870s as a result of cheap jet travel most of the captive audiences became dispatched so the organizers needed to reinvent the festival. One of the innovations introduced was the beauty show for students who were on holiday with the hope that, that will also draw their parents to the festival. This activity is now what metamorphosed into the present day "Miss America" beauty pageant.

The media loves reporting spectacular happenings; therefore, create some extraordinary events as part of your festival. Also assemble for the reporters enough dignitaries that the reporters could interview. etc. In this regard, you must exercise caution to avoid the pitfalls of the organizers of the presidential convention which held in Atlanta city in the late 70s. The organizers expected that by hosting a presidential aspirant to a public debate, the city will attract attention of the press and invariably favourable publicity to the city. The convention was not well planned. It was boring since the presidential nominee was well known ahead of the convention. The media had little to focus on at the convention so they sought alternative stories around the city. They found poverty, slums, dirty streets and the likes which they reported. The gain of this convention in terms of publicity for the Atlanta city was therefore the reverse of what the planners intended. Here are some tips on media planning for your event:

- a. Timing of your event: the event should hold early in the day to fit into the activity of broadcast news crew and newspaper reporters. They want to come early so they can film and write their stories ready for 7pm newscast or editing for their next morning newspaper editions.
- b. Weekends are low news days so they are often good days to host events. Most stations don't have much crew too on weekends.
- c. Advance notice to broadcast stations enable them plan better to cover your event in terms of staff deployment etc. From my experience three days' notice is

good enough. Remember to attach a press release explaining highlights of the events, expected participants and significance of the cultural event.

7. Adjudication: if the cultural event is competitive, ensure that you reorient/train your judges on the guidelines and ensure they are not only of high credibility but are properly in tune with the objectives of the event/competition. This is often neglected by most event planners in the cultural sector. The quality of adjudication has direct impact on the credibility of the festival and invariably, the satisfaction of some critical stakeholders.
8. Budgeting: Cost-effectiveness is one of the qualities that determine the success of your event. How much did it cost you to realize your goal vis-à-vis your achieved results/income?. Is it cost effective? Could it have been achieved with less? From my experience, the following are some of the major cost items on the budget of Cultural events or any special event for that matter.
 - a. Rental Cost: venue, canopies, P.A system, lighting etc. they charge on move-in and move-out days calculate well if it's a two day event you may plan for three or four days depending on the company. Hotel halls, you need to set up early or even rehearse a day before. You can negotiate a discount based on bulk purchase.
 - b. Security Cost: Bouncers, Police, Federal Road Safety Commission, etc. you can pay them daily feeding allowances to ensure they do not leave your work at critical moment to go and eat.
 - c. Production Cost: Costumes, decoration, banners, signage, etc.
 - d. Labour Lost: You need workers to carry in and off things allowances for volunteers too needs to be calculated. – Union dues and Crew.
 - e. Marketing Costs: Advertisement, Public Relations, Sales, interactive movie etc. Cost benefit analysis of each.
 - f. Talent Cost: performers, keynote speakers, MCs, comedians, etc.
9. Sponsorship of your Event In the face of dwindling economic resources, often when one is appointed to organize an event, particularly in the public service or community environment, he/she is often given minimal finances to plan and execute the event. In that case, it is important to acquaint yourself with alternative sources of sponsorship for your event. Traditionally, the primary sources of funding include:

Primary Sources of funding for your Cultural Event

- “in kind” or barter arrangements
- grants from government or its agencies
- grants from international donor agencies and charity organizations, development agencies and heritage bodies

- lottery grants or matching funds
- fund raising activities related to the event
- commercial borrowing from banks
- companies/corporate sponsorships

In writing your sponsorship proposals particularly to corporate organizations, remember to should show measurable statistics or quantification of benefits the sponsor stands to gain e.g. How many visitors will your cultural event likely attract? Where will the participants or visitors likely to come from? How much will each of these visitors spend? Which of the event will they attend and how is it likely to impact on local businesses? Will this be a positive outcome in terms of public image for the host community or sponsor? Etc. Secondary streams of income for your cultural event

You may wish to explore the following areas to raise alternative income for your event:

- Concessions, stands, franchise, rentals.
 - Sales of advertisement space in programme booklet, brochures, guidebooks.
 - Proceeds from sales of car park stickers, parking fees and transport services.
 - Sales of spaces for catering, fast food, sales stalls.
 - Proceeds from sales of commemorative items or souvenirs.
 - Proceeds from patronage of corporate hospitality areas, lounge, suits, chill out areas.
 - Sales of raffles tickets, lottery, games, tombola
 - Photographs and CD sales.
 - Broadcast rights (this works better for major cultural/sporting events).
 - Membership type subscriptions and repeat visit.
10. Monitoring & Evaluation: It is important that as you set your targets and plan details of your event, ensure that you build into every segment of appropriate mechanisms for monitoring the execution of your plans. Thereafter, you need to also conduct an evaluation of the processes and successes or failures recorded in the course of running the festival. This is important in order to ensure that you are learning from your mistakes as you plan future events.

Some of the core activities you need to consider during the evaluation of your work include:

- Finalize your accounts in terms of income and expenditure; did you lose or gain?
- Finalize all contracts for the event. This includes comparing final bills with agreements entered into with vendors or service providers at the beginning of the event preparation.
- Send media a final press release to update or remind them of what transpired during the event.
- Send 'thank you' messages or letters to all volunteers.

- Send special reports, album or publications on the event to the sponsors. One way to do this is to gather press cuttings as well as publish special reports, video documentaries or magazine programmes on proceedings of the event.

11. Evolve a Report from your Debriefing Session

Debriefing is part of the evaluation activities which may involve a dinner, luncheon or special meeting of the central planning committee and major stakeholders that facilitated the hosting of the event to receive and review feedback from the participants. Your report should address your performance in the following areas:

- a. Participants
- b. Media and Press coverage
- c. Staff and Management.
- c. Vendors.

CONCLUSION

This paper has so far discussed some of the salient points cultural events planners need to consider in order to guarantee successful management of cultural events particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. It observed that faced with the limitations of competing financial demands, the hitherto teeming participants in most cultural events have become more selective and sophisticated in their choices, tastes and propensity to respond to invitations. Consequently, the creativity of the average event planner is highly tasked since (s)he has to compete for attention of the target participants for the event with many other choices from which they have to decide.

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