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FOUR SUDAN`S CULTURAL VALUES – AN INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS

Ionel Sergiu PIRJU¹

Abstract

The case study for this article is limited to four cultural dimensions of the Republic of Sudan (power distance, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity and uncertainty avoidance). This limitation is a direct consequence of the political and the economic contexts in Sudan which are making impossible a scholar survey (ex. GLOBE research about national norms and values) in this country.

In analyzing these dimensions, we will focus on a comparative presentation of the above-mentioned norms with the similar ones belonging to the countries of the ten International Clusters (Globe classification). For the Easter European Cluster, the author selected Romania, for the Nordic Cluster – Sweden, for the Germanic Cluster – Germany, for the Anglo-Saxon Cluster – United States, for the Latin European Cluster – Spain, for the South American Cluster – Mexico, for the Confucian Cluster – China, for the Middle East Cluster – Kuwait, for the South Asian Cluster - India and for the Sub-Sahara Cluster – Namibia.

Keywords:

Sudan, cultural values, international, power distance, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity, uncertainty avoidance

1. Introduction

The Republic of Sudan (known also as the North Sudan after the South Sudanese referendum in 2011) has an ancient tradition (the ancient kingdom of Kush) but the modern name has an Arabic origin “Bilad al sudan” which means “the land of the black people” (Mareng C.D. 2009).

Like all the African independent nations, in Sudan exists “a common heritage of colonization and suppression through slavery” (Mangaliso, 2001) and the human interdependence in front of foreign powers is highly appreciated.

The reason for choosing this subject is that the cultural dimensions of the Republic of Sudan are improper disseminated in the international area due to the fragile political and economic situation. This reality is not a strength for the staff of the international companies and associations which are currently working in this sensible area (United Nations, Amnesty International etc.). The nomadic ethnic group are making almost impossible

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a survey about how the people are perceiving themselves and how they define their culture. "Culture is always a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment, which is where it was learned. Culture consists of the unwritten rules of the social game. It is collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005).

This analysis is important because, in Sudan there was no improvement in human development in the last 30 years. According to Human Development Index (2017) the Sudan rank is 165 (from 196 countries) with an extreme underdeveloped social system (63% life expectancy at birth, internet users 26%, poverty rate 0.290 index MPI etc.).

A short Benchmarking analysis of four cultural dimensions, with the above-mentioned countries is necessary because in Sudan it is reported a passive attitude regarding the future of the people. This situation exists in practice, even the state has the legal duty to perform the social, economic and political development. One of the reasons is also to realize a comparative profile of Sudan's cultural dimensions, because this country (with huge natural resources) has been experienced a high inflation and a political and social instability in all its modern history.

Another problem about a social survey is the strong distinction between the Muslim community (the majority in the Republic of Sudan) and the non-Muslim people which now are concentrated in the newly created state of South Sudan.

All the ethnic groups are having their own linguistic and racial criteria, in the North are living Arab related and Berbers communities (Muslims) and in the South the majority is formed by the traditional black African communities (Christians and Animists).

The Sudanese Arab are approximately 70% of the populations and the rest is formed by the traditional native groups as: Fallata, Fur, Beja etc. (CIA Word Factbook, Sudan).

As a limitation for the research we can mention the inexistence of Sudan's cultural values in the Hofstede's survey or in the GLOBE Book of the In-Depth Studies. To make a homogeneous survey it is a very difficult task because of the conflict between the Muslim community from the North and the Christian and Animist groups located in the South. The north part of the country could be ranked in the Arab-speaking region as Egypt or Morocco. The South, the living place of traditional African cultures, is related with the values from Kenya, Tanzania or Zambia.

As a direct consequence of such a big number of ethnic groups, religions etc. in the Republic of Sudan it was complicated to find samples for

Sudanese cultural values. There is only one study available online: “Interpreting cross cultural blending teaching and learning along Hofstede’s cultural dimensions” by Johannes Cronje, realized on a group of students from the University of Khartoum.

There are also new studies that’s implies that Hofstede’s cultural model does not reflect with objectivity the characteristic of Arabic interfaces (Khanum M.A.et alli, 2012). In case of Sudan, where is a melting pot of cultures and traditions, the situation is even more complicated.

By presenting the Sudanese four cultural dimensions (power distance, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity and uncertainty avoidance) and an international Benchmarking analysis, the intention is to present how the people express their satisfaction/dissatisfaction in comparison with the subjects of another World cultures.

A Benchmark presentation is necessary because the Republic of Sudan is not very known in European academic area regarding its status quo in economic performance and political vision. A comparative approach will give us the possibility to understand the reality in this African nation which is currently struggling with massive political, social and economic issues. Our intention is not to condemn the international poor performance of the Sudanese Republic, but to present a comparative framework of national norms versus various countries belonging to the most representatives International Clusters.

2. Power distance – Sudanese versus World hierarchy acceptance

Power distance can be defined as: “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede G. & Hofstede G.I. 2005).

For the Sudanese seems normal to have tall hierarchies and “there is likely to be focus on expertise, authority, experts, official stamps and logos, together with a strong emphasis on social and moral order. Leaders are likely to have a stronger social prominence, and there are likely to be explicit, enforced barriers to information” (Cronje J. 2005).

The score for power distance (Figure number 1) in Sudan is an expression of high emotional distance in society, a hierarchical dependence and a tremendous polarization of the society (rich and poor people).

Figure 1. Comparative analyses of Power Distance. Source: Author apud Hofstede Center, 2017.

In the precedent figure we noticed that only in Romania (90) there is a higher power distance than in Sudan (80). Similar values were measured in Mexico, China and Kuwait where we can find an extreme deference, prudence and obedience as a consequence of a lower educated employees class.

The relative high-power distance might be the result of the conflict between the official army and the troops of the ethnic groups for the natural resources. In Sudanese society the problems can be resolved by a parade of power and “in large power distance countries people ...rarely discuss politics: political disagreements soon deteriorate into violence. The system only admits one political party; where more parties are allowed, the same party usually wins elections” (Hofstede G. & Hofstede G.I. 2005). The political basis of power distance in the republic of Sudan can be related with the conflict between the elite groups and the traditional communities (and this conflict has ethnicity for starting point) for land and water. We can notice an economic dimension of power distance to achieve monopoly.

The introduction of the Sharia Law with all its constraints (prohibition of alcohol, low rights for women etc.) created also a gap in terms of power distance between the Arab elite and the African traditional societies.

The high power distance is a classic example of strong Leadership, where like in all Sub Saharan African Cluster: “charismatic/ value based and participative leadership is viewed as positive contributors to outstanding leadership. Autonomous leadership and self-protective leadership were seen as slightly impeding affective leadership” (House et alli, 2004).

3. Individualism vs Collectivism

“Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people`s lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede G. & Hofstede G.I. 2005).

Our opinion is that the study presented by Cronje, with a very high individualism (39) is reflecting the opinion of well-educated persons, a two-year Masters` programme in Computer-Integrated Education of the Sudan University of Science (Figure number 2). The subjects of investigation are eager to obtain a personal performance in a global linked society, so they are not very linked with the traditional values. In consequence, a high score in individualism is normal for the youth who want to improve the personal skills and to climb on the social scale by their own academic achievements.

Figure 2. Comparative analyses of Individualism vs Collectivism. Source: Author apud Hofstede Center, 2017.

The high individualism is demonstrating that the students are preferring to contact the professors individually and in assignments where the students had to support their work with photographs ``no single photograph was seen of any cooperative work`` (Cronje J. 2005).

In the same time “the professors dealt with the lack of a culture of cooperative work by teaching it overtly. Students were also required to go out to schools and teach lessons in which cooperative learning formed a central focus. Video recordings that students made of the lessons showed that they were able to integrate cooperative learning successfully into their teaching and learning activities” (ibidem).

The high individualism it is related with high performance in doing business activity, but like in other Muslim countries, the economic etiquette is based on the Islamic ritual (avoidance of the meetings during Ramadan, lack of punctuality, chaotic bureaucracy etc.) (Fard & Noruzi, 2011).

In the rest of the country, the author's impression is that exists a high collectivism which consists the central axis of the traditional African communities (Muslim or non-Muslim).

We can distinguish two traditional groups in the Republic of Sudan and in both the group security is prevailing over the personal welfare.

The primitive system of economic values for the pastoralists (traditional Arab related communities from the North) is based on the importance of their herds and animal products (milk, meat and skin). The sedentary agriculturalists are represented by the African traditional communities which traditional economy is based on the production of food for their families and when is possible market crops. Those groups (Berti, Mahariya, Tanjur, Tama, Zagawa etc.) in the dry season are been affected by intermittent attacks (Mareng C.D. 2009), so to survive, their sense of community must be very high.

Both for Muslim and non-Muslim communities from Sudan exist an In-Group Collectivism which “reflects the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in their organizations, families, circle of close friends, or such small groups” (Chhokar J.S. 2004).

4. Masculinity vs Femininity

“A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be

modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life” (Hofstede G. & Hofstede G.I. 2005).

In the Figure number 3 it is presented the values of Masculinity vs Femininity in Sudan and other ten different countries.

Figure 3. Comparative analyses of Masculinity vs Femininity. Source: Author apud Hofstede Center, 2017.

There is a medium perception of masculine values in Sudan (the same score it is found in Kuwait) which means that in the universities, the women are appreciated. More masculine orientated countries than Sudan are: Germany, United States, Mexico, China and Namibia.

From the above figure we noticed that a high masculinity index is common for the top economies, as China or United States. In United States there is a minus related with the high masculinity because the share of responsibilities it is not common, this is the prerogative of the top leadership (Burdus, 2006).

In the masculine societies it is noticed a security at psychological level, the communication is from the low levels to the top and if the feedback is negative, it will be never transmitted to the leaders (Gavreliuc, 2011).

In traditional Muslim nations, like Republic of Sudan, the men are appreciated if they are: strong, ambitions and goal oriented. The women are having a good reputation when they are taking care of their children, are

respecting the religious fashion code and are not lazy and naive. According to this mentality, the femininity is associated with negative attributes compared to the masculinity. As consequence there is a lower gender egalitarianism, and this reality it is a constant in the Arab World which is guided by a strong Coran acceptance and its traditional exegesis (Durkheim, 1995).

In masculine countries the men are eager to get a higher recognition for their activities, are accepting the challenges and the social status is highly evaluated. The working relation is based on submission and the work cooperation is not very appreciated.

In conclusion to this cultural dimension, we can infer that in Sudanese society it can't be easily found a gender egalitarianism which can be defined as: "the extent to which an organization and society minimalizes gender role differences while promoting gender equity and the equality of genders" (House R.J. et alli, 2004).

5. Uncertainty Avoidance – struggle for improving the *status quo*

"Uncertainty avoidance can therefore be defined as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations. This feeling is, among other things, expressed through nervous stress and in a need for predictability: a need for written and unwritten rules" (Hofstede G. & Hofstede G.I. 2005).

"The members of an organization or society strive to avoid uncertainty by relying on established social norms, rituals and bureaucratic practices to decrease the probability of unpredictable future events that could adversely affect the operation of an organization and society and also to remedy the potential adverse effects of such of unpredictable future events" (Chhokar J.S. et alli, 2005).

Figure 4. Comparative analyses of Uncertainty Avoidance. Source: Author apud Hofstede Center, 2017.

From the figure number 4 we noticed that the values of Uncertainty Avoidance are the same in Sudan and Kuwait (another muslim nation) and similar with Germany and Namibia. Identical with the perception of Power Distance, Romania is having the highest score which means that their people are accepting and living in uncertain environment more than in Africa, Asia or South America. Eastern Europe is characterized by uncertainty and fear to avoid uncertain situations and anxiety is a characteristic of the work environment (Hofstede, 2010).

The lowest score is obtained by Sweden (29) which means that the people are feeling safe and protected by the social norms. In the Nordic Cluster it is the tendency to identify the needs of all the stakeholders with the welfare of the entire company (Ho& Wang, 2011). In contrast with the situation from Sudan or Eastern Europe, in the Scandinavian nations the human capital is highly evaluated and the feeling of security is an excellent motivation for the work's productivity (Constantinescu et alli, 2002).

The survey realized by Cronje on a group of students from the University of Khartoum showed that uncertainty avoidance is manifested as a prevention from the errors and the intention to reduce the general ambiguity. "What is noticeable here is that the students' overarching fear of the unknown led them to work together. Thus, one cultural trait (uncertainty avoidance) overrode another (individualism)" (Cronje, J. 2005).

The need to avoid the problems and uncertainty is having a negative impact in the economic performance in the Republic of Sudan. The situation is different in United States where the main characteristic of the economic success is the existence and competition of the free market, with a high level of the quality of the products (Schwartz, 2007).

Uncertainty avoidance is rooted in the classical confrontation between the Muslims and non-Muslims groups for the natural resources (water, grasslands etc.). The migration and the uncontrolled cross-border process has been created uncertainty in front of the other indigenous groups with different language and culture.

A classical uncertainty exists between the traditional groups of pastoralists (Arabs from the North) and agriculturists (native Africans).

The relative high uncertainty had been the premises for the South Sudan segregation since the official institutions situated in the North (Khartoum) had been constantly marginalized the traditional non-Muslim groups. "The confusion of political structures of ethnic groups has contributed to the power struggle among the Sudanese communities" (Wischmeyer, 2004).

The uncertainty is continuously stemmed by the Government from Khartoum which in many occasions had been ignoring the human rights of some ethnic groups and this situation generated serious conflicts.

Conclusions

As we can also notice in the Eastern European Cluster (Romania case) in the Republic of Sudan we can observe a mismanagement of the core problems of the society, and this situation was reflected in the high scores for power distance and uncertainty avoidance. But beyond any imaginations it is the cultural clashes between the ethnic groups supported by religious intolerance. It could be stated that "Sudan is a country on the verge of collapse because it has failed to deal with it diversity" (Mareng C.D. 2009).

The lack of internal stability and the inefficient external performance is a direct consequence of racial differences and a poor human orientation.

The international reputation it is affected by the variety of national cultural traditions and the lack of access to modern education which are having a tremendous long-term impact on the future development.

This short Benchmarking analysis, with its important limits, indicates that the social cultural factors are playing a key role in understanding the values of a nation. The incomplete study of the Sudanese culture is a serious problem to understand as foreigners this complex civilization, and it is a provocation for the author to develop a future research in this field.

The high power distance in the Republic of Sudan is an expression of lack of confidence in the possibility to change the sad reality and taking initiative to a *de facto* modernization of the country. The also high levels of uncertainty avoidance seem to demonstrate the need of the people to be guided and not to take initiative in social reforms. The highly individualistic score presented by Cronje, in our opinion, reflects the student attitude toward success. In order to achieve performance, they are not looking for cooperation, rather they are basing on their strengths.

The educated citizens of Sudan are aspiring to a more performance orientation with less assertiveness and a competent and visionary leadership. The Republic of Sudan needs a transformational change with a new category of leaders capable to inspire by self-performance orientation, integrity and self-sacrifice. This change is hard to foresee, because in present there is an autonomous leadership without personal modesty, rooted in religious traditions and conflict inducer.

To understand better the contemporary challenges from Sudan, more research is necessary to determine the cultural dimensions of the country considering the linguistic, political and religious barriers. The intention is to overcome in the future the present limitation of analyzed data about the Republic of Sudan's cultural dimensions by collecting data in all the demographic areas of the country.

Such a future study would be a perfect premise for an international Benchmarking analysis to determine the future strategy for a better World synergy.

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