

Abstract

From an economic point of view, development of a region is largely determined by economic related factors. However, in the recent past there has been an increasing recognition by economists and regional scientists on the influence of cultural factors on regional development. This recognition has brought together economists, regional scientists and other social scientists in studying the link between cultural factors and development. One of the cultural factors alleged to have received little attention in the current debate is work ethic. This lack of attention occurs at a time when less developed regions are dominated by traditional work ethic, despite the fact that they are increasingly being integrated into the global market economy. This work reports the findings on the rationale behind the persistence of the traditional work ethic in regions which lag behind despite the rapid transformation of these regions from a tribal society based economy to a global market based economy. Our understanding of these reasons will assist in our efforts to devise meaningful solutions for the development of these regions. The study was carried out in Tanzania, involving two administrative regions, using mixed methods research strategy. In collecting data for this work, surveys involving community members, school children, religious leaders, and government officials were complemented with semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observation methods.

The results have revealed that though the dominant type of work ethic in the two cases was traditional, there exists a difference between the two cases, whereby the relatively developed region has indicated signs of moving away from a traditional work ethic when compared to the less developed region. In addition, the findings have shown that the reasons why a traditional work ethic persists in these regions include a socialization vacuum, as a result of uncoordinated interaction between traditional and modern institutions; the existence of socialization contents that do not match the changing context; uncoordinated socialization organs alleged to jeopardise thought patterns of the people in the studied regions; and the existence of social dilemmas due to pressure to obey the prevailing work ethic. Though I do not claim to have established causal-effect relationship, in the context of this study the findings suggest that differences in work ethic can partly be used to explain regional development differences. Thus, in efforts to address the underdevelopment problem in these cases and other regions in similar conditions, planners, policy makers, and other development practitioners are advised to focus their attention on how traditional work ethic can be made responsive to the changing context, without necessarily falling into the trap of totally imposing other peoples' culture to such regions.