TRANSFORMING SOCIETY THROUGH IGBO CULTURAL VALUES: THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By

MARCEL UGWU EZEA
Department of Igbo,
FCT College of Education,
Zuba-Abuja.

Abstract
The early man’s discovery and the use of iron technology transformed not only the man himself but his environment. An attempt to find a more convenient domain led to his settlement in a community and finally society with divergent cultures. Culture on the other hand regulates the life of the society in many ways. This paper therefore, examines the effects of cultural values in transforming society through Information & Communication Technological (ICT) devices like radio, computer, television, facebook etc with emphasis on the Igbo most cherished values such as respects for the elders, farming, obedient to rule of law, accountability, commercial activities among others. The author noted that the best way to transform a society is by encouraging all to practice and embrace these cultural values for a better living. Power failure, insecurity, HIV-Aids scourge, unemployment were enumerated as some of the challenges facing Igbo cultural values & society at large. Implementation of cultural policy, massive food production, beefing up of security in West Africa Sub-regions were suggested as solution towards having a peaceful society devoid of vices.

Keywords: Transformation, Society, Culture & ICT.
The historical development of man showed that he made several efforts to transform himself and the environment as far back as 3000BC. For instance, the early man’s life started with the use of stone tools to create his environment and to decorate caves with pictures of animals. He was a wanderer then, moving from place to place in search of a greener pasture. He finally decided to settle in a tiny village made up of mud houses or huts, thus enabling him to raise crops, rear animals which led to evolution of agricultural industry. As a result of this, some of the early men started to specialize in various kinds of trades, skills, farming, arts and crafts as well as manufacturing of war implements to defend their territories. Elís & Egler (2007) noted that their interest in farming operations eventually encouraged them to settle in a city-based civilization and they stated:

*the early man abandoned wandering to settle in a small tiny villages rearing crops, animals, hence the evolution of agricultural villages... City-based civilization came a little more than 5,000 years ago. Here and there around the world, cities and city states emerged, kings, priest and traders rose to wealth’s and power.*

Similarly, Ezea & Ezugwu (2005:134) agreed that within the same period man learnt how to use stone tools and discovered fire. The discovery of fire according to them enabled man to domesticate animals, prepare his food and engage in agricultural practice. Dioka (1957) in Ezea & Ezugwu (2005:134) noted that:

*man’s discovery and user of iron technology transformed not only himself but also the environment. The early man passed through many hurdles in his quest for scientific discovery culminating in having a settled community and society. It is the early man’s persistence in scientific discovery that lends credence to our modern society with divergent cultures.*

The early man also introduced the idea of community living, clan, family, local government area, state, country and continent which eventually formed the society.

**Definition of Society**

Society is defined as a collection of people in an ordered community with various aspirations, values and cultures. Glo English Mini Dictionary (2014) explained that “society could mean fashionable and wealthy people, organizations or clubs including the company of other people”. From community perspectives, Ogunniyi & Oboli (2006:15) opine that “it is a social unit because all or most of the members share common social, cultural, economic, political, professional values and aspirations”. According to them, communities make rules and regulations guiding the behavior of every member of the community for a happy and peaceful co-existence. As
organizational unit, Segun, Sola & Wale (2005: 90-95) contended that society refers to a population of people (or other social animals) that is organized in a co-operative manner to carry out the major functions of life including reproduction, shelter and defence, through social structures-described by them as a recurring patterns of people’s behavior and relationships. In essence, society consists of various kinds of people such as human society, agricultural society, pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial societies. In terms of political, language, cultural, associations, we have Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC), society for the amalgamation of people, historical society of Nigeria etc.

However, human society which has undergone transformational processes from Stone Age periods to the present technological advancement is the major focus in this presentation.

Transformation, according to Hornby (2006:1572) is a complete change in something …, the process of or an attempt made to change attitudes, shape, condition, appearance, or conditions of the society such as behavior and thinking perceptions of individual or group of people. For instance, the UN summit of 2000 resulted in global transformation agenda called the New Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Okwudishu (2007:15) explained that “in late 1990s, aid official keen to revive the global fight against poverty came up with a novel strategy and proposed to both developing and developed countries that rather than making vague statements about health, food production and primary education, it would be more effective to have a clear set qualified objectives that government could aim to achieve within a set time frame. In the same vein Mutiuullah (2010) insisted that goal or agenda setting is imperative for a peaceful and progressive society. He described agenda as prioritizing … on the basis of need to developmental objectives so as to ensure sustainable development. He noted that:

... the 7-point agenda of Yar’Adua administration...is a total overhauling of the ailing economy with the view of leveraging the achievements of the MDG and giving a new life to the Nigeria as...has been carefully packaged and clearly articulated as a framework to launch Nigeria into the year 2020 as one of the biggest 20 economies in the world.

The attempt to actualize and meet the deadline of the global target of MDGs has prompted various countries in the world to embark on programmes aimed at transforming the citizens in areas of education, culture, health, agriculture, cultural and tourism among others before 2015. In essence, the Federal Governments of Nigeria, both past and present have designed programmes tailored towards transforming her citizens. For instance, between 1970 and 2014 the following programmes have been initiated, as listed by Onuoha (2002), in Ezea & Anochirionye (2007:32):
2. **1975-1976**: Eradication of corruption and transition to civil rule (General Murtala Mohammed).
3. **1976-1979**: Operation Feed the Nation (general Olusegun Obasanjo)
4. **1979-1983**: Austerity, measures (Shehu Shagari)
5. **1983-1985**: War Against Indiscipline (WAI) (General Mohammed Buhari)
7. **1993-1998**: Vision 2010 & Social Empowerment Programme (General Sani Abacha)
8. **June 1998-May 1999**: Handover Programme for transition to Civilian Regime (General Adulsalam Abubakar)
9. **1999-2007**: National Reform & Implementation of MDGs (General Olusegun Obasanjo)
10. **2007-2009**: 7-Point agenda (Musa Yar’adua)
11. **2009-2014**: Transformation agenda (Goodluck Ebele Johnathan)

The general objectives of the above programmes by Nigerian governments is to change the life of citizens in areas of attitude, (War Against Indiscipline) social interaction, empowerment of citizens, security and others for a peaceful and egalitarian society to reign.

Notwithstanding the good intentions of these programmes, the actualization and realization of the objectives of government depends largely on how members of society perceive each other in terms of personal behavior or attitude, internalization of cultural values and general interaction within a given community/society. Cultural values therefore, become the best instrument for transforming society because it is the nexus of peoples’ life, philosophy and national development.

Culture influences peoples’ way of life such as belief system, dressing code, good governance etc. It is made up of many elements as follows: (Iftikha, Marylee, Herbert & Elisabeth, 1999:13)

1. Social organization: such as family patterns which includes father, mother, children and other relations.
2. Social class/status based on the rating of society in terms of money, occupation, beauty, position and education. Social class/status contributes a lot to the vices of the society because most people aspire to belong to one class or another through dubious means like stealing, 419, ritual killings etc.
3. Customs and Institutions: They focus on the rules and regulations of the society and its enforcement on individuals through traditional institutions like traditional rulers, titled men and women, peer-groups and village/town unions/associations.

4. Language, Ifitkha, Marylee, Herbert & Elisabeth (1999;15) noted that language is the cornerstone of any culture. They observed that without language people would not be able to communicate their feelings, values and knowledge nor pass their cultural heritage from generations to generations.

5. Arts and literature. They are the products of human imaginations like, arts, music and literature. They teach the world about their cultural values through folktales, handed down from their forefathers. Folktales is one of the ways Igbo people bring up their children in cultural values through informal education.

6. Religion: People express their beliefs, faith through the worship of God and ancestry spirit. Temples, churches, mosques are the avenues through which they communicate to their God/gods. According to Ifitkha, Marylee, Herbert & Elisabeth (1999:13) “religious beliefs help people to answer basic questions about the meaning and purpose of life. It also aids cultural values which society consider very important”.

Other elements of culture include traditional administration, government and economic systems with traditional rulers, chief priest, council of chiefs, as the anchor and motivator of peace in the society.

Types of Cultures
The period of old Stone Age, led to evolution of cultures and discovery of scientific ideology. They are of different types; (Ekpo, 1994; Dioka 1997; Ezea, 2003; in Ezea & Ezugwu, 2005:135)

1. Pebble culture: A period during which the simplest tools were produced by the early man.
2. Acheullian/Sangoan culture: This refers to the early inhabitant of Congo who lived in the world environment. It was time hand axe was discovered.
3. Nok culture: the oldest iron age culture discovered in Africa, South of the Sahara desert.
4. Igbo-Ukwu culture: provides the earlest evidence of radio carbon and its use of copper technology in Nigeria.
5. Material cultures: Are the man made objects like stone tools and weapons, houses, pottery etc.
6. Non-material culture: Are man’s ideas, behaviours and social institutions developed by man like religion, economic and political ideas.
7. Culture of industrialization and technological advancement. They are the real and the determination made by the world super-powers like Japan, USA, China etc to break new ground in technology.
The classification of cultures above shows that a society is a man-made culture under non-material culture. Similarly, material culture focuses on the behavioural pattern of society with rules and regulations guiding them. Man started with iron-culture, inventing stone tools, creating houses, developing skills, farming operation and domestication of animals. This led to discovery of technological devices – like gong, wooden drum to more sophisticated technological device like GSM, computers, facebook, radio, internet etc.

To safeguard the life and property of any given society, there is need to promote some of their values, whether community, race or ethnic group. These cultural values are vital in life of everybody for peaceful co-existence. Dioka (2003) in Ezea & Ezugwu (2005;134) opine that culture regulates the society, provides materials for human co-existence … man and his culture can only be studied within the content of the society. Culture induces education, kingship, science and technology, arts and crafts, moral and use of machines.

Igbo race as an integral part of society has culture which regulates their lifestyle and world views. In this paper an attempt is made to illustrate how Igbo cultural values can transform the citizens of Nigeria and entire world with the aid of Information and Communication Technological (ICT) devices.

Igbo Cultural Values

Igbo people according to Ihejirika (2013;9) inhabit the South Eastern part of Nigeria. They are one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. There are several myths surrounding the origin of Igbo but nothing is yet settled because of lack of written records. He further explained:

With a population of over 50 million Ndi Igbo rank among the five largest … in Africa and tenth in the world. The history of Nigeria shows that Ndi-Igbo have proven to be the …. suigeneris among the black race as exemplified by the likes of Equano, Blylen, Azikiwe, Abiam, Okpara, Ironsi, Sir Odumegwu Ojukwu, Emeka Ojukwu, Anyaoku, Oputa, Okonjo Iweala, Ikoku, Mbanefo, Achebe … and hundred more who recorded their fists in Nigeria and among the black race.

Omote (no date) in Ihejirika (2013;10) noted that:

It would appear that God of Africa has created the Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages. Even after the genocide and the deliberate policies of exclusion practised by the past
Nigerian governments, the awe of the Igbo persisted and even dazzled other Nigerians and the world by their survival instincts and attributes.

The catalyst behind the survival of Igbo people largely depend on their culture of hard work, creativity, farming, commercial acumen and intellectual capabilities. These are some of the traits the Igbo indigenes display all over the world in pursuit of greener pasture and promotion of their cultural heritage/values.

Igbo Cultural Values

According to Ezea (2008:3-4) Igbo cultural values are those values Igbo people regard as worthwhile, desirable actions, aspirations and expectations passed down by the forefathers from generation to generation such as honesty, respect for elders, hospitality, trading and title taking.

The Federal government of Nigeria in recognition of the roles value system play in the lives of her citizens, enshrined in the National Policy on Education; FRN (2004:2.7 & 2.8) state:

*The national education goals...are therefore, the indication of the type of values and attitude for the survival of the individual and Nigeria society ... the quality of instruction at all levels has to be orientated towards indicating the following values; respect for the worth of individual, faith in man’s ability to make rational decisions and moral and spiritual principle in an interpersonal and human relations.*

Obioma, (2012:v) further explains that “values are what individuals, groups or society care about and adhere to vehemently in life for sustenance, such as honesty, regard and concern for the interest of others, discipline, right attitude to work, courage and national consciousness”. These form the Nigeria’s core value which is in conformity with Igbo cultural values with Nri as the power house.

The Nri hegemony

The contributions of Nri as the pan-Igbo civilization towards cultural values is enormous. Ezea, Anochirionye & Okeke (2014:152) noted that the history of Igbo culture is traced to Nri (a town) in Anocha Local Government Area of Anambra State. It plays a role in Igbo cultural life. Afigbo (1981) in (Ezea, 2013:3) confirms it stating that Nri is the heart of Igbo nationality and has prerogative power in their religious worship. Onwuejeogwu (1992:248).

*The hegemony which Nri people established over certain area of Igbo culture ... were based on the premises that through the instrument of*
religious beliefs, human beings were disciplined into obeying a high authority stationed at Nri town”.

Notwithstanding, their roles, Nri is the citidal of Igbo cultural studies and anthropology. There, the younger ones are exposed to the finest aspects of Igbo culture and also taught how to avoid the contrary. It is the best place for studying Igbo laws, customs, religion, values and language of the people. Basden (1938) in Ezea & Eugwu (2005:152). The areas covered include:

i. **Discipline of citizens:** such as respect for elders, obedient to the rule of land, and greetings.

ii. **Hospitality:** Implemented through the presentation of kolanut accompanied with white chalk (nzu).

iii. **Farming operation:** Igbo expose their younger ones to farm operations at the early stage. This enables them attain self-reliance, and independent in life. Yam, cocoyam, cassava, maize including animal husbandry are the focus here.

iv. **Institutions:** Igbo institutions like peer-groups, traditional rulers, village associations, town unions, titled men and women are agents of Igbo cultural values. They enforce laws on the citizens.

v. **Ceremonies:** Marriage ceremonies, breaking of kolanut, coronation of chiefs, child dedication and a host of others are learnt here.

vi. **Festival:** New yam festival, masquerade and feast in honour of goodness of fertility are observed here.

vii. **Religious worship:** deals with their spiritual life. In Igbo community, both traditional and Christian worship are practiced. The Igbo people believe that the best way to transform society is to empower them spiritually (Ezea, Anochirionye, & Ugwu:5-6).

viii. **Arts & Crafts:** Igbo people teach their children how to create their world and make a living through arts and crafts. In essence, they engage in basket making, sculptures, carving, weaving etc. The Nigeria new 9-year basic education curriculum encourages creativity and cultural orientation.

ix. **Information Dissemination:** Through the aids of town crier, and the use of local means of information dissemination like ekwe (wooden drum) Ogene (metal...
gong) messages on the current issues are passed to the community. Announcement of death, important ceremonies, date of new yam festival, coronation of chiefs, clearing of pathways, communal work/village projects including defaulters of norms of the community such as stealing, rapping, murder etc are done through these local instruments.

x. **Recreational activities:** Traditional wrestling and moonlight play form the content of Igbo recreational activities. Igbo people believe that through these activities, waste products are eliminated from their systems, thereby providing them with healthy body full of life. Other activities that keep their body and soul together include traditional dance/cultural display, folktales and music.

xi. **Virtue of justice and fairness:** Igbo people inculcate in their citizens the virtue of justice and fairness through staff of justice and fairness called ofo Uwalaka (1996) in (Ezea, Anochirionye & Okeke, 2005:152) described it as “the chief dispenser of justice, an arbiter and highest court of appeal in matters concerning the Igbo race”. According to them, “Ofo” has the power to fish out criminals in the society through the invocation by the elders. On assumption of any administrative office, “Ofo” is the first thing given to a person in question to ensure that he rules with the fear of God, humility, love and honesty.

The efficacy of “Ofo” in dealing with offenders in Igbo culture, checkmates their performance in various positions they occupy. Through this, Igbo people are encouraged to live above board in matters of governance and administration of their communities; hence, transforming Igbo society spiritually and politically for peaceful co-existence and national development.

The role of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) in Transforming Society through Igbo Cultural Values

Information Communication and Technology (ICT) is defined in various ways. According to Omenuko (2014:8-9) it is the combination of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) with other related technology … such as e-mail, audio-video, radio broadcast, television, interactive radio, audio cassette and CD-ROMs. Emenanjo (2005) in Okwudishu (2014:2) stated that ICT encompasses many different but complementary technologies which are digital in nature. They include: fibre-optics, leaser discs, packet switching, Direct Broadcast, Stachite (DBS) Digital Satellite System (DSS), multimedia technology. He further enumerated ICT based tools as electronics computers, telecommunication, television component parts and software that animate. Manajan (2002) in Okwudishu (2014:2) noted that ICT “refers to a broad range of activities and equipment including all the tools applications and information that are available and accessible via computer such as radio, newspapers, books, internet etc in one integrated environment”.

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Yusuf (2007, and Osakwe, 2012) as cited in Chimeke, 2014:4) noted that:

…electronic technologies are ICT used for accessing, processing, gathering, manipulating, presenting and communicating information … they are the devices which are utilized for information and communication needs of institutions, organization, students and individuals … They include computers hardware & software, networking, telephone, video, multimedia and internet… thus the electronic technologies refers to the use of computers and telecommunication facilities to store and retrieve information from various sources, generate and transfer ideas and also impart knowledge to recipients.

It is therefore, in view of the above task performed by ICT in the modern times that made it utilization very imperative in day to day activities. As par-transforming society through cultural values, information communication and technology (ICT) plays the following roles:

- **Awareness of cultural values:** The information and technological devices like radio, gingles, documentaries, have created awareness to the populace on the need to embrace culture of respect, fear of God and good eating habit as obtained in Igbo cultural values. Radio provides the best tools for cultural education because it can penetrate inside the most remote area in the villages all over the world. Moreso, it is cheap to procure and maintain.

- **Hospitality:** The importance of kolanut in Igbo culture has been emphasized practically through television programmes on the procedures and ceremonies associated with it. Kolanut to Igbo signifies life. Igbo people frown at anything that affects life negatively including killings of fellow human beings. Kolanut is presented to visitors with white chalk, Igbo people inculcate spirit of love and idea of receiving visitors with open heart through white chalk. Apart from pregnant women taking it as a source of iron, it encourages the citizenry to love one another. A lot of videos have been produced on kolanut in the life of Igbo people.

- **Live transmission of Igbo cultural activities:** Cultural activities like new yam festival, coronation of chiefs, exposure of social vices such as stealing, murder, rapping killings are projected through television network programme. Television has an advantage over radio because it combines both the sense of sight and hearing. The annual new yam festival can be transmitted live world-wide. The significance of the
festival is that for one to participate actively, he must be pure at heart and holy. Thus, an average Igbo man avoids soiling his hands during and after the celebrations.

- **Punishment of offenders or defaulters of the land:** In Igbo cultural practices, there are laid down punishment for one who contravene the law of the land. For instance, if somebody is caught stealing a fowl, the animal is tied on his neck and made to dance round the market places and village squares. This exposes evil people to the public. Such procedure can be videoed, recorded, fed into facebook and distributed nation-wide as a deterrent to the rest of the community.

- **Farming operations:** The activities involved in the production of food crops starting from clearing the ground to harvesting period can be shown to members of public on television, radio and published in newspapers magazine, journals etc. Emphasis here should be on the techniques involved in food production and the importance of proper feeding. Members of public are encouraged to go into farming, else hunger will set in, which may result in malnutrition, hunger and even death.

- **Reward of good behavior or achievement:** Igbo people have a way of encouraging men, women and youths who distinguish themselves in one way or the other. One of the ways is by giving the person chieftaincy title as a mark of honour and appreciation. Airing such ceremonies through radio/television will encourage others to aspire to greatness in the community.

- **Adherence to oath of office:** When a new king/chief is installed, he is given a staff of justice and fairness called “Ofo” as instrument for oath taking. When he swears with “Ofo” in his hands, he is bound to be transparent, honest, accountable and rules with fear of God. If in the process of his administration he diverts from the promises made, “Ofo” has the efficacy to strike the person dead instantly. Besides, “Ofo” has power to fish out criminals in the society. Members of the Igbo community avoid anything that can bring shame on them because “Ofo” is watching the behavior of every member of the society. Such can be recorded, stored, televised to members of public to view.

- **Igbo drama produced and recorded in video tapes are many and varied:** The theme ranges from condemnation of sexual immorality to social vices in the communities. Through both electronic and print media, a lot of cultural values have been inculcated in the citizens thus, transforming their lives in a positive way.

**Challenges to Igbo Cultural Values/Society**

The following factors pose threats or challenges to Igbo cultural values via society:
Lack of basic amenities: Basic amenities like road, shelter, water and electricity are not sufficiently provided. This induces social unrest, violent and affects society & the culture in a negative way.

Unemployment: A greater number of youths in Africa are without job. A jobless individual is likely to be violent in nature.

Political instability in the most African countries, threaten cultural education in the society.

Apathy to cultural heritage: Many people including the Igbo race do not want to be identified with their culture nor practice it.

Other challenges to cultural institution in Igbo land as Ezea, Anochirionye & Ugwu, (2014:9-10) enumerated them include:

- Lack of computer training, the epileptic power supply, poor network services, computer virus, lack of trained technologists to handle some of the ICT devices, poor funding, security challenges, outbreak of Ebola Virus, HIV-Aids and Religious activities pose a big threat to cultural values and society.

Conclusion

No nation can exist without a culture which regulates their life style and belief system. Culture as the nexus of society, encompasses the food, religious worship, language and world views of people. Igbo race as integral part of society, is endowed with culture capable of changing their life style such as respect for elders and interest in food production. Through these cultural values, good traits are inculcated into citizens for sustainable transformation and national development. Regrettably, due to influence of foreign culture and Christianity the values are not embraced by all in the society. Nkwo (1984) in Ezea, Anochirionye & Ugwu (2014: 4) lamented thus: “the early missionaries and their converts filled with religious enthusiasm that bordered in fanaticism declared war on our culture. Our customs and institutions were attacked and many were proscribed. Others that were not considered too bad to be outlawed were merely discredited and we were made to see through the eyes of the white men in our life”. To redeem the image of our cultural heritage, the use of information communication and technological devices like radio, television is therefore, imperative for societal transformation and empowerment.

Recommendations

To transform society through cultural values via ICT, the following recommendations are made.

- Infrastructural facilities development should be carried out in the palace of traditional rulers and monarchy. There is need to provide basic amenities
within the cultural areas and modernize them to help the royal fathers perform their traditional duties.

- The threats of insurgency in African countries should be collectively tackled. No nation can exist without peace and harmony.
- The fight against deadly diseases like HIV-AIDS and Ebola Virus should be intensified. More awareness should be created in Nigeria and beyond through the use of technological devices like Cable, Network News (CNN), Satellite, DSTV, and National television stations.
- ICT laboratories under the auspices of educational technology should be provided in educational institutions from primary to University level.
- There is absolute need to revitalize the power supply in Nigeria. Constant power supply will ensure proper utilization of technological devices and achievement of vision and mission of the cultural education in the continent.
- A bilateral agreement between Igbo traditional rulers, state, the Federal Government and the western nations on cultural education and transmission is hereby advocated.
- The Igbo indigenes all over the world should have a change of attitude towards their culture. A culture not utilized is a dead one.
- Cultural rooms or museums should be provided in all educational institutions within and outside Igbo land. The Odinani museum Nri should be expanded, equipped and made functional. The facilities put up by the University of Ibadan are fast deteriorating. The five states in Igbo land should have a lot to do in giving structures there a new look and redeem it from extinction.
- Anti-Virus like Norton with internet facilities should be used to protect documents saved in some e-technology devices like computer.
- The Igbo Studies Association (ISA) and other related associations should be made to vet and supervise all Igbo programmes going outside Nigeria (Ezea, Anochirionye & Ugwu, 2014).
References


