

# The Impact of Globalization on African Culture

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## Abstract

The concept of globalization and its application to human development have been significantly more pronounced in relationship between the developed rich western worlds, which are the new technologies, and the poor developing countries. Globalization has continued to engender enormous debate, controversy, protests and demonstrations that are sometimes violent. Globalization has many dimensions; the paper examines the cultural dimensions of globalization from Africa perspective. Africa is a continent blessed with abundant human and material resources, globalization is a reality which no country can run away from, the paper argues that with globalization the whole world is tending towards a homogeneous culture, we (African) have failed to integrate the positive African values into the borrowed western values. The issue of globalization is a serious matter for concern; the way people live and work are changing both positively and negatively as a result of globalization. The paper concludes that efforts should be made to identify and isolate the foreign practices that have negative consequences on the cherished values of Africans. This requires a conscientious re – orientation of African to intensify efforts in redeeming whatever is redeemable from its rich cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Globalization, Culture, Values, Development.

## Introduction

Why globalization? Of what relevance is culture to modern man? Why should we bother about culture and development, since the general consensus is that, it is only through science and technology that development comes to the society? To answer these questions, the paper attempts a definition of globalization and examines its influences on African culture, though different scholars at one point or the other have expressed divergent views as regards the impact of globalization on individuals, nations, and the world at large. This discussion is necessitated by the impacts of globalization on African cherished values and culture, culture here consist of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, works of art, rituals and ceremonies.

The paper further examines arguments in favour and against globalization especially in the area of culture with particular reference to Nigeria, the paper points out that globalization of culture has not really been explored, though culture is dynamic and therefore experience change, African continent has various major ethnic groups who have very distinct cultures, that abounds with various customs and traditions that are rich, colourful and exciting. Given the extreme poverty and technological underdevelopment of the third world countries, especially Africa, we (African) cannot possibly opt to have nothing to do with the rest of the world in this era of globalization. The paper recommends possible strategies for enhancing development in Africa based on her socio – cultural orientations in the era of globalization.

## The Concept of globalization

Globalization as a concept refers to the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distance localities in such a way those local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa, it is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an observe direction (Giddens, 2010:19). Globalization is a phenomenon that brings about breaking down of barriers among different countries of the world which result in increasing integration of the world economically, socially and politically. It is important to say that this enable people from different parts of the world to communicate within the twinkle of an eye.

The world becomes a “global village”, in terms of speed at which information moves from one part of the world to another, Advances in information technology has really transformed the face of the earth, while some see it as second industrial revolution, others refer to it as the information age. Globalization can also be seen as a product of modernity, Robertson in his words says globalization is intimately related to modernity and modernization as well as post modernity and post modernization (1991:14). As Banji puts: globalization means increasing integration of national economies with that of the rest of the world, the intense economic and technological exchanges have been referred to as creating borderless world.(2015:21), from the foregoing it appears there is no any precise widely definition of globalization. Globalization is sweeping across the whole world, tuning it to a global village. The third world scholars see the present day globalization as the latest stage of European economic and cultural domination of the rest of the world, for instance Wilfred maintains that

Globalization is a continuation of a long tradition of over five hundred years, the tradition of imperialism. Globalization is only the latest phase and expression of this uninterrupted history of domination and subjugation of peoples, nations and cultures through the conquistadors and colonizers. It is a tradition of political, economic and

cultural domination of some nations over others. (1997:1).

If this is so, then the third world countries need to reduce its extent and level of dependency on foreign powers and institutions that merely relate with them based on economic and other interest alone.

### **African Culture in a Global Context**

African continent has various major ethnic groups with distinct cultural values, most of the cultural values centres on the family and the ethnic group. Culture can be defined as the people's way of life, it consists of all ideas and objectives of a given set of people, guiding the individuals' life individually and collectively, these includes arts, beliefs, customs, inventions, language, technology and tradition (Bohanah, 1981:942). It can also be refers to as the way a group of people live – the foods they eat, how they dress, the language or languages they speak, their political, social and economic institutions, their religion, arts and craft, music, and dance, as well as their oral literature, such as poetry and storytelling. (Perbi, 1999:29). It is the integrated system of learned behaviour patterns which are characteristics of the members of the society and which are result of biological inheritance, and the way of life of an entire society. Culture varies from society to society, so also values. African cultural environment is characterized by some unique values that are different from Europe, America, and other parts of the world. With globalization people's lives are being open to other cultures; African countries have not been able to independently articulate their own history, culture and identity.

The cultural values of the technologically and economically advanced countries e.g. united states and members of European union are being transmitted across nations, with this type of development it becomes difficult for the underdeveloped countries e.g. Africa, to preserve her distinct cultural identity. Bello argues that

Our attitude today is largely influenced by the perception and viewpoints cultivated as a result of slavery as well as colonial and post colonial education. As a result of this, we tend not to appreciate ourselves or our cultures and therefore disregard or undervalue the potential contributions this heritage can make to our contemporary development efforts. We thus tend not to believe and have confidence in ourselves, our endemic capabilities and potentials. (2016:92).

The western world conceived development only from material or technological perspective. Globalization from this perspective is an attempt to justify western culture. Walters in his words maintains that: "globalization is the direct consequence of European culture across the planet via settlement, colonization and cultural mimesis; it is also bound up intrinsically with the pattern of capitalist development as it has ramified through political and cultural arenas". (1995:3). However western culture now becomes the standard by which all other cultures must be measured, this is as a result of lack of research interest in our (Africa) traditional technology in preference for foreign products. The truth of the matter is that all cultures from different parts of the world are equal in value and function because they serve the needs of their individual societies.

The federal policy of Nigeria defines culture as the totality of way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of the living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetics and religious norms. The main components of culture are norms and values. Norms are the expectations that define what is acceptable or required in a social institutions. Values on the other hand are standards set by a society which should serve as guides to what is right and proper for people in that society. These values then become the basis of judgments people make as to what is desirable, correct and good, as well as what are undesirable, incorrect and bad. In African society there is placement of importance on high moral standards, Africans had high moral codes, we have those that are unpardonable and those that cannot be compromise, e.g. marital infidelity and premarital sex is a serious offence. Debasement of our moral and religious values is in immodesty, nudity, individualism. Today we (Africans) have moved away from a land of nature of tradition and rural setting where the cockcrow signal, the dawn of a new day, to a modern day world with all the evils associated with it. There are no more societal restrictions on sex, bachelors and spinsters compete with married men and women on sex game. As a matter of fact hotels and brothels make fortunes from this. Another important respect of the cultural values is shedding of blood, in African societies there is high respect for and reverence for human life. Shedding of blood is a taboo. With the establishment of powerful mass media, foreign values, norms, ideologies, and way of life are being exposed to the rest of the world, for instance we have the VOA, BBC, CNN and other satellite and cable organization.

Respect for human person over and above material things is very crucial in African setting, this is why the Igbo people in Nigeria will say "onye nwere mmadu ka onye nwere ego" this means he who has a human being is greater than he who has wealth. Other aspects of the problem engendered by Globalization are in the area of religion and education. The traditional African society was highly religious, there are laws concerning every holy days, festivals, and rituals. The worship of god form part of their worldview. Language is an important component of culture, in Nigeria for instance, most of the people (with the exception of few) cannot communicate in their mother tongue. Nigeria for instance needs to revisit the language policy, namely Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo which are the three major indigenous languages.

Culture incorporates the values of the people, to sustain these rich cultural values of the African society; we

need to employ formal education to ensure transmission of the culture into the people that represent the custodians of the future of the African society. The concept of globalization should not be a one way traffic affair, but rather a two way traffic affair. Our (Africa) desire to attain sustainable development and solve the problem of poverty motivated the developing countries to change their economic system and structure, it follows that Africa stand to benefit from globalization, if only we can pay good attention to our culture and see culture as an agent of change, such that peoples aspirations and objectives are channeled in the direction that can promote development.

### **Culture and Development in Africa**

In Africa, Nigeria inclusive the promotion and propaganda of western culture dates back to the era of colonialism. Globalization agenda today are those of the international capital – the World Bank, the IMF, or countries that are protecting and nurturing the interest of these institutions. It is another opportunity for the capitalist countries of Europe and America to dominate the rest of the third world countries. One can safely say that Nigerian government has engaged in a lot of advocacy and pursued a lot of programmes to champion the course of culture and to show its place in the development process. In 1972 a department of culture was created. In 1975 the National Council for Arts and Culture was established. In 1977, Nigeria hosted the Second black and Africa Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). In 1988 a cultural policy put in place here in Nigeria, there is equally the establishment of CBBAC i.e. Centre for Black and Africa Arts and Civilization.

In a similar vein, the United Nations Organizations (UNO) through its agency, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1975 organized an Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural policies in Africa at Accra, Ghana. Other Conferences are: 1982 Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico. 1988 Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development in Stockholm, Sweden. 2002 World Summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg, South Africa.

From the foregoing we can see that culture is not totally forgotten by those in government. Proponents of globalization argue that globalization helps to expand opportunities for nations and to stop globalization would mean stopping the economic and technological progress which means trying to stop the rotation of the earth because it is the only possible path for world economy. They went further to say that globalization brings about efficiency in industries; it promotes real choices, for instances the freedom to trade, to choose markets, to access required appropriate technology for production.

However, criminal networks take advantage of the most advanced technologies to traffic around the world in drugs, arms, precious metals and stones and even people. Nigeria for instance turns out to be a dumping ground of substandard commodities and hazardous products. The problem of underdevelopment in science and technology experienced in Africa is due not to lack of natural and human resources but that of undermining her cultural heritage, we need a functional education that integrates arts with science and technology. Self realization is the highest form of development, education is not only meant for the development of the intellect but also for the enhancement of the creative and emotional capacity of the human being, art should not be underrated in preference for science.

### **Reviving and Popularizing Indigenous Cultural Values in Africa**

Africa needs to revive and popularize her indigenous cultural values in order to develop her local industrialization and local potentials. The first step is for the leadership of the country to live by example by imbibing the principle they ask their followers to imbibe. William Abraham in his book: *The Mind of Africa* sees culture as a means of creating order in the society. He writes: ‘‘By uniting people in common beliefs and attitudes, or at least in tolerance for certain beliefs, actions and values, culture fills with order that portion of life which lie beyond the pale of state intervention.’’ (1962:27). Education is equally important in the area of cultural and moral vitality and individual self realization, it is the level of education that will determine the quality of contribution that the individual can make.

Today globalization has incorporated into the Africa school system the American culture, technologies of computerization, satellite communication; we are not saying that Africans should deny themselves the use of these resources. Rather African should be a participant in the globalization of culture, all stake holders should bring their contribution and maintain his black personality within the global concert of cultures there is need for us to revive and popularize the indigenous values of the people. The issue of culture building in Africa is very crucial, as a matter of fact The Cultural Policy in Nigeria was aimed to create a cultural identity for her African values, beliefs, attitudes, mindsets marks her out and distinct from other peoples of the world.

Globalization should serve as a wake – up call for Africa to re – examine its identity, no real progress and development can take place without a good attention to the culture of the people. The articulation of the place of culture in development is not an end in itself; it is a means of infusing into our national psyche a productive capacity and innovation for adapting our traditional resources for our industrialization. Acholonu maintains that: a nation cannot develop beyond its level of cultural development. (2012:7). If we truly understand what this means, then it is our responsibility to translate this into reality, we have to move away from our business as usual way of doing things if we really want the Africa continent to achieve authentic development. According to critics

the third world countries would find it difficult to generate expertise in science, technology, management and financial regulation, because they cannot sustain a high degree of specialization, the crucial question now is: should they draw and exist in their native culture? The truth of the matter is that Africans in the pre – colonial societies had a high level of functional interaction socially, economically, politically, and culturally. This means that her traditional technology provide the basis for scientific and engineering manpower.

The westerners mistakenly equate material achievement with civilization. As Schweitzer succinctly puts: “a civilization that develops only on its material side, and not in corresponding measure in the sphere of the spirit, is like a ship with defective steering gear which gets out of control at a constantly accelerating pace, and thereby heads for catastrophe” (2015:20). To him globalization should be a product of an optimistic – ethical conception of the world. One of the functions of philosophy is to protect the dignity of human person against the tendency to treat the human beings as mere objects. The existentialist philosopher is more interested in defending the freedom and dignity of human person. Sartre for instance argues that in western civilization human beings are being turned into machines. Philosophers have a lot to contribute to reviving and popularizing our indigenous cultural values, there is a relationship between philosophy and culture. Oladipo is of the opinion that:

Philosophy has a crucial role to play in the production, clarification and propaganda of the ideas and values that guide the thought and life of a people. Philosophy serves to challenge people’s established views of themselves and their condition and precondition for defining and redefining who they are and what they can be. African philosophers should not be restricted only to the task of defending an African culture through the demonstration of the coherence of their underlining beliefs and concepts, because culture is a dynamic phenomenon, there is also the need for critical reappraisal of African culture in order to discover its strength and weaknesses. This will bring out the self understanding that brings out the kind of socio – cultural reconstructions that would enable Africans to come to terms with the challenges of contemporary life. (1999:20).

We have African philosophers like Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, Uzodinma Nwala, Segun Gbadegesin, and a host of others that have contributed in no small measure to the critical and reconstructive studies of African traditional conception of man, society and nature in order to understand the intellectual foundation of African culture.

## Conclusion

It is pertinent to conclude that the challenge before Africans now is to embrace and cherish her cultural norms and institutions especially those that are beneficial in a global village. However, science and technology can only produce meaningful development if they are culture based. Suffice it to say here that education is one of the basic components of the society; through education people transmit their cultural values from one generation to another. Culture is not static but dynamic and as a result experience change, this change may be as a result of internal or external influences.

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