



# IGEDE Cultural and Moral Values as Basis for Community Development and Restoration of Peace in The Land, Benue State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

*This work has addressed Igede cultural and moral values as basis for community development and restoration of peace in the land, Benue State, Nigeria. Igede is a language spoken by the Igede people of Benue State of central Nigeria. This means that Igede is both a language spoken by the people and it is the name of the ethnic group. The paper discussed the Igede people's cultural and moral values that sustained them. It looked at Igede man of yesterday, of today and the Igede man of tomorrow, drawing their differences and similarities, which relied on three issues raised. Suggestions for growths and development of Igede people nationwide were raised.*

**Keywords:** Igede Culture; Moral Values; Community Development; Igede People; Peace.

## I. Introduction

Nigerians live in two worlds; the world that celebrates Nigerian culture with all its cultural and moral values as well as the world of Western culture. It means that that Nigerians have learnt to marry these two cultures to avoid conflicts or cultural accidents as they grow up. To this end, every society or community member exhibits certain peculiar behavioral characteristics, because culture involves the people's beliefs, norms, habits, values, mode of dressing, talking, eating, music as well as their religion (Agogo 2002; Agogo, 2024). By implication, culture is the sum total of the learned behaviors of the people. It is also seen as all other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society, focusing on attributes that people acquire as a member of the community (Kottak, 2005, Agogo, 2010).

According to Agogo (2020), the people's cultural values and beliefs show the patterns of the people's behaviors that individuals engage in a given society or community that affect his daily living. This means that the shared beliefs, values and expectations of the people define the people's relationship to each other as well as to their natural environments. This has shown people the importance of moral and cultural values in a given society and community. Abuse of these moral values has led to some issues raised as well as the activities that affect the people's peaceful living in the society, in which Ali and Ahmed (2019) informed that traditional institutions in Nigeria help to sustain the people's cultural and moral values. In a similar way, Lund (2006) had observed the role of traditional institutions in stabilizing the people's cultural and moral values, especially in settling disputes among the citizens in the society. And that Africans' traditional rulers are always truthful, honest, loyal, responsible and dedicated to administrative responsibilities (White & Clark, 1990).

## Nigeria's Cultural and Moral Value System

Everybody in a given society or community faces myriads of challenges that constantly affects his or her relationships with self and with others in the environment. This is hinged on the moral behaviors of individuals. This, according to Denga (2011, P.32), has addressed negative behaviors or values, such as dishonesty, cheating, stealing and the desire to commit evil acts (violence, war, arson). To Denga therefore, moral values are seen as guides by which individuals judge how reasonable and appropriate their relationships with follow men are and how to live well with each



other in the given society/community. This celebrates cordial moral value system that sustains the people and is upheld by the cultural and moral values of the people and is upheld by the cultural and moral values of the people.

To Egbodo (2017, P. 36), cultural values are the core principles and ideals upon which an entire society or community exists. Ogah (2019, P. 43) opined that, "Igede has a puritan culture that stands against stealing, fornication and adultery, against incest, coveting neighbor's property, act of wickedness, among other vices. These are pointers to the fact that every society or community has positive and negative cultural and moral value systems. This is why every child in every society, begins to learn moral concepts of his or her people, at early age of development (Denga, 2011). In most societies, the first moral concepts which a child is pressed to learn, are politeness and greetings. These are taught as soon as the child learns to talk, walks around and feels things.

Nigeria as a country has her approved value system, which only differed slightly from one region to another. However, the coming of Western Education to Nigeria brought with it, its ways of doing things, seeing things, which are invariance with many of Nigeria's moral values. According to Nwabuisi (2002), Ella (1993) and Agogo (2020), the prominent Nigerian values include:

- i. Dignity of labour
- ii. Chastity among women folks
- iii. Patriotism to one's community as well as hospitality
- iv. Honour and respect to parents, elders and chiefs of the land
- v. Respect for hard work and productivity, truth and generosity
- vi. Respect for sanctity of life (Nobody should take another's life)
- vii. Attitude of mutual respect for all.

These moral values should be meditated and taught to the children through the family and other agents of communications and integration. However, Nigerians should note the defacement of these Nigerian cultural and moral values due to the prevailing influence of the Western culture on Nigerian value system. For instance, the impact of Western education on Nigerians values has led to the loosening of the close-knit family system with the resultant loss of corporate obligations. The effect is the near loss of the people true identity as the result of moral decay.

### The Igede People

Who are the Igede people? Where did they come from to settle where they are today? Let's take a look at what some Igede people think who they truly are.

i. Igede connotes a people (tribe), language and land (place). An Igede man is always full of gratitude. It is what defines the humanity of the individual. HRH Oga Ero CP(Rtd). Adirahu Ny'Igede I in Ero, (2018).

ii. Igede as a tribe has her culture that makes her unique and distinct from other tribes and people around them. (Ogah, 2019).

iii. Igede people are always determined in punishing those who fail in the public display of integrity, honor and courage. (Ode Ojowu cited in Agogo & Agogo, 2023).

iv. Igede is the language that is spoken by the Igede people, especially of Benue and Cross River States, Nigeria. They are a well-modelled group of people that other tribes respect and honour (Agogo, 2023).

v. Igede people have a complex system of gerontocracy in which the elders in the society serve as the fabric that has held the people together. (John Egbe Enyi cited in Agogo & Agogo, 2023).

vi. In a traditional Igede society, it is the most senior elder of the appropriate lineage (**Onegba**) that is the **Ogabwo** or the elder (Ode Ibu Iganga, 2008)

vii. The Igede people are imbued with passion for preserving their traditional values as well as their political and cultural system that they uphold (Egbodo, 2017).

viii. Igede culture venerates nature, which is believed to be interconnected with **God (Ohe Oluhye)** and the **gods (Ihie Ileji)**. Igede people are truly the most celebrated ethnic group in Benue State, Nigeria, always at peace with each other, and generally in peace with their neighbors in Benue, Cross River and Ebonyi States, Nigeria.

The Igede people cherished their cultural practices that is development oriented (Ogede, 1997). They have fertile savannah region that is good for agricultural production (Enyi, 1990).

On the world map, Igede land is found within latitude 60 41 and 700 41 North and longitude 80 101 and 80 351 East. In Nigeria, Igede falls within the middle Belt region in the North Central zone (Enyi, 1990; Agi, 2015, P. 80) informed that;

*The Success of a nation is measured not by the amount of natural and human resources available to it, but by how it can harness its resources to improve on the standard of living of the vast majority of its population (Nigeria).*



On the development of Nigeria, Igede ethnic group inclusive, Ola sees a community as a social group of any size, whose members reside in a specific locality, and a cultural and a historical heritage. The state structures that were inherited. The state structures that were inherited from colonialism in Nigeria, Igede, “were small and fragile”, with lots of cultural challenges for the natives. However, the development of the Igede people rested on the unity of the elite, which tended to influence a lot of positive change in the society. The problem is that, when the elite lost touch with the people’s culture, development was stalled. This led to what Onah (2010, P.5) called “poverty of the mind” by the elite, thereby bastardising their people’s cultural and moral values. This had led to many crises and conflicts in Igede as the result of cultural and moral decay.

#### **Igede Cultural and Moral Values**

There are some negative cultural and moral values among the Igede, Benue State, Nigeria. **They do not:**

- i. Respect unexpected and too sudden wealth without traceable sources
- ii. Accept stealing and telling of lies, as these are social and cultural stigma on the perpetrators.
- iii. Accept corrupt-infested individuals as their acts defile the Igede land
- iv. Accept a person with erosion of family name and there is sanctity of human life.

These acts and many of such evils develop into an uncut grass. According to Kombo (2010), an uncut grass easily grows into a forest with wild animals. All Igede people with evil minds are usually sanctioned before they spread their evils to other people. This is why Kombo (2010) informs that “it is the person who has offended the land that it pursues”, and an infested firewood is usually thrown aside. It is therefore expected that Igede people should be morally healthy and sound. This is why Agogo (2002) informed that in Igede land, the morally dislocated children are therefore carriers of negative Igede cultural and moral values, because, Igede is a land of rising sun for all to benefit from.

This means that, the Igede people:

- i. Are a unique ethnic group that maintains peaceful coexistence,
- ii. Anchor their cultural values on the past and present, to be applied and be acknowledged at all times as a special group of people, with respect for their culture
- iii. Have positive relationships across clans, villages and lineages

- iv. Have respect for the elderly, the chiefs and the people in authority.
- v. Have culture that is shared, symbolic, integrated and can be adaptive or maladaptive.
- vi. Igede culture does not teach violence but peace and love

#### **Issue One:**

**When the people’s life experiences are altered by the changing circumstances, the system of beliefs that give meaning to life and has provided them with a means of coping with them must also be altered to accommodate them. When this is not done timely and correctly, crises and conflicts may result.**

Igede cultural and moral values that have held the people together in the past (Agogo, 2020; Egboda, 2017)

- i. Trustworthy – they can be trusted and relied upon
- ii. They are their brother’s keeper
- iii. Humble, honest, hardworking and transparent
- iv. Not jealous or envious of each other’s progress, but generous
- v. Abhor things that tended to put their characters in question
- vi. Polygamous with a large family size – as index of one’s wealth
- vii. Highly religious with total submission to **Ohe Oluhye** (Almighty God).
- viii. Respect for Elders, Igabwo, Chiefs that attract blessings
- ix. Respect for sanctity of life (Nobody can take another’s life)
- x. Promotion of family life and identity/name
- xi. Chastity among women folks with emotional stability
- xii. Respect for dignity of labour (respect what they do for a living)
- xiii. The ancestral spirits hover above for protection or reprimand, among others.

Observance to these values or not has led to the categorization of an Igede man into, yesterday, today and tomorrow, because of their levels of adherence to the Igede culture.

#### **(A) The Igede Man of Yesterday**

These positive Igede values are like fabrics that have helped to hold the people together in love. That love was sincere and truthful to themselves. There were no rooms for **lies** and **idle talks** at all levels by Igede man of yesterday. Evil doers were promptly sanctioned and reprimanded according to the laws of the land. Every Igede man was treated the same as



there were no favorites, especially as to how to punish evil doers in the society.

**Igede Man of Yesterday therefore:**

- i. Lived in a world that was both physical and spiritual to him.
- ii. Lived in harmonious relationship between the humans and the supernatural forces and the spirit world (as the ancestral spirits hover over humans to protect and reprimand, as the case may be).
- iii. Believed in ethical values of oral folk tales (**ujo**) at moon light.
- iv. Established positive relationships across clans and villages for peaceful coexistence.
- v. Cherished her cultural practices – (yam festival, traditional marriage systems, naming ceremonies, music and dance festivals) were celebrated annually.
- vi. If there were misunderstandings between clans, inter clans, villages, inter villages or between **Onegba** or individuals, the elders would wade into it. With three or five Kola nuts, the issue was discussed, resolved and disposed for peace to reign.
- vii. Youths totally submitted to the cultural practices of the people. Youths were also given their respects (everybody was happy).
- viii. Respect was accorded a man of wisdom, honour and of oratory, not money mongers and people of loose character and reputation.
- ix. Evil doers were punished according to the cultural laws, irrespective of who was involved.
- x. An elder would discipline any erring child as a way of correcting him or her, without receiving any scolding from the parents. Discipline was sincere and prompt.
- xi. There was respect for human life, with air of peace and honesty everywhere.
- xii. Life was peaceful and love for each other was transparent,

**Issue Two:**

**The tragedy of life is what dies inside of man while he still lives. Somebody has stolen the people's peace or have we misplaced it? We in Igede must find our peace back, because a house built with saliva is easily destroyed by dews.**

The peace that once reigned among the Igede people of Benue State, Nigeria is eluding her today. There is the need to retrace their steps to find the peace that is slipping off the hands of the people of today.

**(B) The Igede Man of Today:**

Let us take a look at who these Igede people of today are and what is happening to them now;

Every Igede child is expected to be surrounded with positive moral values to make him live well in the society. It is not about what he or she does or does not, but it is about that hidden and unseen force that makes him or her extraordinary... his determinations and his resolve to exhibit positive values at all times. This is what Ogah, (2019) says, "keeps him moving when everyone around him is doing its best to stop him". Such a determined Igede child is said to be too blessed to fail. How do we support such a determined and focused Igede child today?

This stage of today's Igede man rests on ways to help one another in a more meaningful sectors of development. It is therefore addressing issue three of investing on another, to raise more destiny helpers in Igede land.

**Issue Three:**

**To invest in properties is good, but to invest in people is far better. Ones greatest trophies are the many tears you have wiped away from people's faces, but not just the things you have acquired while in office or in your private businesses. It is true that some people you helped may have turned their backs on you. Do not worry. Do more for others as your God sees you and the positive spirits of Igede are also seeing you.**

**The people you help today will become your soldiers in the battles of life tomorrow. Learn to help one another at all times, even people outside your immediate community. Good deeds always find their ways back.**

**The Igede Man of Today therefore Behaves thus:**

**Today**, some Igede people cheat, steal and tell lots of lies at the slightest opportunity. Truth is a scarce commodity in Igede today.

**Today**, some Igede Traditional Rulers and the Elders are working at cross purposes, as people cry out for unity and peace until Team 40 molded them. **Today**, some Igede children have introduced values of greed, hatred, intolerance and selfishness into the games of politics and in the ways of doing business and even being deeply involved in diabolic activities.

**Today**, Igede children blackmail themselves just for a cup of tea that cannot even quench their hungry souls rather leaving anger and threats behind.

**Today**, communal activities that Igede people are known for at **Agba** are all gone. Igede Agba today looks like a normal meal in our families/villages.

**Today**, laws that hold Igede traditional values and powers together are rusting very fast, leading to moral decay and rotteness, with vulgarity.



**Today**, many Igede people easily raise swords against their fellow brothers and sisters at the slightest provocation; nobody to calm their nerves for peace.

**Today**, Igede people's meekness and love towards each other are now stained and **messed up**, leaving badly damaged Igede people's integrity and respect within and outside Igede land.

**Today**, some elders run to the younger ones with hot blood, for counsel that usually results in violence and crises in our land, thereby pushing peace and development away from Igede land – no good roads, no steady electricity.

**Today**, Igede history is being manipulated and misrepresented by altering the course of events, ideas and things that had firmly held us together.

**Today**, there are many lost opportunities for promoting Igede development plans. This is a serious threat in Igede development plan, an on Igede Agba celebration.

**Today**, there are glaring traces of parental negligence in training their children on the moral and cultural values of Igede people (Egbodo, 2017; Agogo, 2020). These vices are being addressed by the Igede people at various for a.

#### **But Remember That:**

*Every time we turn our heads the other way, when we see the law flouted, when we tolerate what we know to be wrong, when we close our eyes and ears to bad things being perpetuated because "he or she is from my camp", when we fail to speak up and speak down. We strike a blow against freedom, decency and justice in Igede land. These are the woes of today, thereby leading to:*

- i. Cultural and moral value confusion and moral decay
  - ii. Clashes, conflicts and arson in the land
  - iii. Hunger and near starvation staring at us
  - iv. Our inability to manage crises across the land is glaring
  - v. Moral value failures leading to many cultural accidents
  - vi. Youth restiveness and armed dealings/social vices
  - vii. Poverty and high rate of school dropout in Igede
  - viii. Frustrations, leading to emotional instability in the land with lack of community development focus resulting from moral decay in the society.
  - ix. Then, loss of family name and family identity, leading to faceless destroyers in the land.
- According to Osita (2007), and Marke at cited in Ikiejiaku (2012). Violent conflicts in Nigeria usually

arise from corrupt practices in the land. This was followed by religious and ethnic crises.

#### **Community Development in Igede Land**

Community development is a process where the members come together to take collective actions and to generate solutions to common problems to Igede people. Igede elites and community mobilizers are expected to:

- i. Impact positively on the improvement of rural community life of the people through synergy with the government.
- ii. Enhance the people's spirit of entrepreneurship activities by systematic employment or job creation for self-reliance.
- iii. Address the issue of **truth** and avoiding miscarriage of justice that breeds crises.
- iv. Address the community's diverse traditions, customs and values of the people by working closely with Traditional Rulers and the Elders in the community.
- v. Instill in the community members the tradition of dignity of labor and to enhance productivity through sensitization, as it used to be in the land.
- vi. Appropriately compliment the activities of government at all levels through youth empowerment so as to unite the people.
- vii. Ensuring that the efforts of the people themselves are harnessed to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the communities in Igede.
- viii. Enhance educational and religious standards of the people in the community by drawing government's attention to Igede land.

#### **(C) The Igede Man of Tomorrow**

Tomorrow will soon come. The Igede people need to overcome today's challenges before tomorrow comes. Let embrace peace and encourage the people to follow the path of religious harmony.

When the people get close to their creator, they will learn to speak with one voice and address the issues that tend to divide them. It is therefore important to emphasize on the issues that unite the people to live a more purposeful life of hope and security. That is what the Igede man of tomorrow should look and hope for, emphasizing on peace builders in Igede and the larger Benue State and Nigeria.

#### **The Igede Man of Tomorrow**

Peace builders in Igede community of tomorrow should ensure that they are people of honour and integrity and are to:

- i. Be principled persons that are cemented in agape love for one another



- ii. Place others above themselves, thereby removing spirit of pride and ego
- iii. Learn to invest in other's lives for economic growth
- iv. Respect the laws of the land to do the right thing at all times, with focus on peace
- v. Always stand for what is right and for the **truth** that saves and is rewarding
- vi. Ensure to leave lasting legacies on the sand of time for posterity.

Igede culture is never a culture of violence or of disunity, but of peace and love. The culture gives us our uniqueness. This is why you can spot a true Igede person from the crowd based on the way he or she walks, talks, eats, dresses.

Igede people need the bitter **pills of truth** in politics, in education, during communication in the social media, in religion and in our cultural and moral values that we display. Avoid taking hasty decisions or conclusions because of what others are saying about such a person or such a thing. You may be holding the wrong end of the **truth**, the falsehood. (Iganga, 2008). You should not inherit other person's enemy, but learn to enlarge coast of influence.

#### Suggestions for Growth of Igede Land

As the Igede people of today unite together, it is important to advance these suggestions for the growth of the Igede nation today and for tomorrow by:

- i. Exploring the role of culture in community development of Igede land
- ii. Ensuring the continuity of peace building efforts by the Igede people at all levels of human development, especially as Peace Advocates
- iii. Ensuring dialogue and mediation for peaceful conflict resolution
- iv. Identifying and addressing cultural barriers to peaceful co-existence
- v. Developing friendly relations and cooperation across cultural and religious divide
- vi. Avoiding the manipulation of Igede history but based on historical facts with fair judgment on issues of land and chieftaincy matters.
- vii. Respecting our traditional institutions and the council of Elders as custodians of the people's true culture.
- viii. Restricting our youths from media patronage to the detriment of the people's cultural, economic and political heritage, and for their sudden outburst to uncontrolled anger.

All these suggestions can be achieve if the Igede people to speak with one united voice as it used to be in time past. Peace and unity is achievable.

## II. Conclusion

It is important for the Igede people of today to bury their grievances and embrace peace, to run back to their God for shelter, protection and guidance. This will lead to all round community development. To Benson, Egbodo, (2017), Igede culture is our identity, they should keep it alive and sustain it for posterity, ensuring that the peace of yesterday returns to Igede land; a land of peace and unity.

They should learn to uphold Igede cultural and moral values as basis for their community development and for the restoration of peace to Igede land of today. This refocused cultural and moral value system being repositioned will spread peace and unity to the entire Benue State and indeed, Nigeria.

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