

## UNLOCKING SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: THE POWER OF IGWEBUIKE

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### **Abstract**

*The pursuit of sustainable peace and development in Africa faces numerous challenges, including persistent conflicts, economic instability, and social fragmentation even though sustainable peace is a panacea for growth and advancement. This paper explores the transformative potential of Igwebuiké, an indigenous Igbo-African philosophy, as a framework for addressing these challenges. Igwebuiké, meaning “there is strength in unity,” emphasizes communal harmony, collective strength, and mutual support. By analyzing its philosophical foundations and practical applications, this study illustrates how Igwebuiké can enhance conflict resolution, promote inclusive development, and strengthen social cohesion. Case studies from different African contexts were employed to demonstrate the successful integration of Igwebuiké principles in fostering community-driven initiatives and sustainable resource management. Despite modern challenges such as increasing individualism and cultural shifts, Igwebuiké offers a culturally resonant approach to peace-building and development. This paper argues that embracing Igwebuiké can provide African nations with innovative and effective strategies for achieving long-term stability and prosperity for all. The descriptive and analytic methods were utilized to sustain this research; recommendations were made and the researcher held by way of conclusion that the principles of Igwebuiké can enhance conflict resolution, promote sustainable development, and strengthen social welfare systems, paving the way for a more harmonious and prosperous future for the continent.*

**Keywords:** Africa, sustainable peace, development, Igwebuiké, unity, cooperation, community.

### **Introduction**

Africa, a continent blessed with vast mineral and natural resources and diverse cultures, continues to grapple with numerous challenges of sustainable peace and development, challenges such as conflicts, poverty, inequality, and political instability, cutting across the North, South, East, West and Central Africa respectively that hinder its path to sustainable peace and development. In the face of these challenges, the concept of Igwebuiké has emerged as a powerful force, offering profound insights and solutions for unlocking the potential for peace and development in Africa. 'Igwebuiké', a term derived from the Igbo language of Nigeria, translates to “there is strength in unity” and emphasizes communal harmony, collective strength, and mutual support, embodies the idea of communal unity and collective strength in overcoming obstacles and building prosperous societies. According to Nwala (2017), Igwebuiké, offers a transformative approach to unlocking sustainable peace and development in Africa.

The philosophy of Igwebuiké emphasizes community interdependence, collective responsibility, and the importance of unity in overcoming challenges. By leveraging this philosophy, African nations can foster collaborative efforts that promote peace-building and sustainable development, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued in the process.

The introduction of Igwebuiké into peace and development strategies can transform the landscape of conflict resolution in Africa. Traditional approaches often overlook the communal

aspects of conflict, focusing instead on individual grievances. In contrast, Igwebuiké recognizes that conflicts affect the entire community and seeks to restore harmony through inclusive dialogue and reconciliation (Kanu, 2017). This holistic perspective not only addresses immediate disputes but also lays the groundwork for long-term stability and growth, making it a vital tool for policymakers and community leaders across the continent. Thus, this paper will explore the power of Igwebuiké in unlocking sustainable peace and development in Africa, and also look at similar concepts in Africa and how it has shaped the system of those nations where they were practiced. This article outlines the core principles, practical applications, and potential of Igwebuiké in promoting sustainable peace and development in Africa. The method to sustain this research will be descriptive and analytic given the nature of the research in view.

### **Understanding The Concept Of Igwebuiké**

Igwebuiké is a philosophical framework deeply rooted in African communalism. It underscores the belief that individuals are interconnected and that their well-being is intrinsically linked to the well-being of the community. Understanding the concept, Kanu (2017) posited that “Igwebuiké is an Igbo word; one of the major dialects in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. It is a principle that is at the heart of African thought, and in fact, the modality of being in African ontology”. It is a composite word made up of three dimensions (Kanu 2015).

Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuiké*, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. The three words involved: Igwe is a noun which means 'number' or 'population', usually a huge number or population. Bu is a verb, which means 'is'. *Ike* is another verb, which means 'strength' or 'power' (Kanu 2016). Thus, put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power', that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force (Kanu, 2017).

As an indigenous African philosophy, *Igwebuiké*, viewed from an ontological lens, gives an understanding of the human person as a being who is in relation with the other in the world. It establishes that there exists a common link between human persons and that it is through this relationship that every other human person realizes himself or herself. Igwebuiké is the capacity in Igbo-African ontology for the expression of complementarity, solidarity, compassion, reciprocity, dignity and harmony for the purpose of building and maintaining community. Igwebuiké is a philosophical concept rooted in Igbo culture, embodying the idea that “there is strength in unity” (Ekeke, 2018). It emphasizes interconnectedness and complementarity among individuals and realities, “promoting collective growth, cooperation, and mutual understanding” (Nwala, 2017).

The Igwebuiké philosophy is founded on four basic principles which include according to Kanu (2021) is as follows:

#### ***The Principle of Identity***

It states that every being is determined in itself, is one with itself and is consistent in itself. Thus, every being is one with itself and divided from others.

#### ***The principle of Hierarchy***

Every reality in the universe has a force; however, not all realities have the same force. The variety of the degree of forces is at the base of the categorization of being. In the hierarchy of forces, those with a greater force come first, with God at the apex as the source of all force.

### ***The principle of contrariety***

This speaks of the otherness of reality. The word contrariety is from the word contrary. Aristotle as cited in Kanu (2019) defines contrariety thus: “contrariety is a kind of difference, and difference is a kind of otherness”. He writes that: “The term contrary is applied to those attributes differing in genus, which cannot belong at the same time to the same subject, to the most different of the things in the same genus, to the most different of the attributes in the same recipient subject, to the most different of things that fall under the same faculty, to the things whose difference is greatest either absolutely or in genus or in species. The other things that are called contrary are so called, some because they possess of the above kind, some because they are receptive of such, some because they are productive of or susceptible to such, or are producing or suffering them, or are losses or acquisitions, or possessions or privations of such (Kanu, *ibid*). Igwebuike accepts contrariety as part of the natural universe as it recognizes that individual prosperity is linked to the well-being of the community (Ekeke, 2018).

### ***The principle of unity***

In spite of the contrariety of reality, in spite of the singular identity of each reality, there is something common to everything. Igwebuike according to Kanu (2019), “understands every individual reality as part of and the completion of the whole, and thus there is a unity in the midst of diversity. Igwebuike presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. Thus, 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation”. Thus, this principle emphasizes the importance of unity and cooperation in achieving common goals (Nwala, 2017).

These principles collectively promote a holistic understanding of existence and social cohesion. Igwebuike transcends cultural boundaries, advocating for universal relevance in addressing human challenges and fostering communal well-being.

### **Igwebuike And Peace Action (Conflict Resolution)**

The concept of peace, like most concepts in social discourse, has no universal definition. However, peace has been vaguely defined as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence (David, 2006). But this conception has been criticized by many scholars for being inadequate for understanding the meaning and nature of peace (Ibeanu, 2006 cited in Igbuzor, 2011). The Norwegian peace theorist, Johan Galtung distinguishes three types of violence that can help to understand the concept of peace namely:

- i) Direct violence manifested by physical, emotional and psychological violence.
- ii) Structural violence which comes in the form of deliberate policies and structures that cause human suffering, death and harm; and
- iii) Cultural violence which involves cultural norms and practices that creates discrimination, injustice and human suffering (David, 2006). In addition Galtung outlines two dimension of peace. The first is negative peace which is the absence of direct violence, war, fear and conflict at individual, national, regional and international levels; and positive peace which describes the absence of unjust structures, unequal relationships, justice and inner peace at individual level.

According to Igbuzor (2011), Prof. Okey Ibeanor defines the concept of peace as “activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and in the wider international community”.

Viewing peace through the lens of Igwebuike, Kanu (2017) posits that “Igwebuike understands peace within the context of good health, wellbeing, order and freshness. From this understanding, poverty, insecurity, unemployment, waywardness, communal clashes, religious

crisis, and other mysterious and human-made misfortunes are considered to be the opposite or negation of peace”.

More so, Igwebuiké philosophy in relation to conflict does not understand conflict merely as a dispute or disagreement between two persons, or two groups, it rather understands conflict as a dispute touching upon the harmony of reality (Kanu, *ibid*). Thus, it works towards a compromise for the reconciliation of both parties and the restoration of balance and harmony of reality. Thus, conflict is not viewed as a problem between the disputants but as a problem of the entire community. This, therefore, attracts the attention of the community.

Igwebuiké therefore lays emphasis on reconciliation and restoration of social harmony. Its purpose is aimed at rebuilding broken relationships and restoring the community peace. Igwebuiké works towards a situation that acknowledges a mutually beneficial condition rather than just condemning one and exalting the other. This is because it emphasizes cooperation with one another for the common good as opposed to competition that could lead to grave instability within the community (Kanu, *ibid*).

In applying the Igwebuiké philosophy, African traditional societies have long used communal approaches to resolve disputes, emphasizing reconciliation, restorative justice, and the restoration of social harmony. Igwebuiké provides a framework for these practices by promoting dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding (Nze, 2018).

For instance, traditional councils and assemblies in many African communities operate on principles of consensus and collective decision-making, reflecting the Igwebuiké philosophy. These mechanisms prioritize the collective well-being over individual interests, fostering a sense of solidarity and shared purpose.

### **Igwebuiké And Sustainable Development**

The concept of development is broad based. However, many students and scholars see development as progress, moving forward, improvement in the way of life, etc. Igbuzor (2011) sees “development as a multi-dimensional process, one that changes the economy, polity and society of the countries in which it occurs”. Amartya Sen (2008) sees development as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. According to her, “development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states”.

The Human Development report 2007/2008 stated that: “Human development is about people. It is about expanding people's real choices and the substantive freedoms, the capabilities that enable them to lead lives that they value”. According to Igbuzor (2011), choice and freedom in human development mean something more than the absence of constraints. People whose lives are blighted by poverty, ill health or illiteracy are not in any meaningful sense free to lead the lives that they value. Neither are people who are denied the civil and political rights they need to influence decisions that affect their lives (UNDP, 2007).

For Pat Utomi (2006), “development simply put is discipline. It is about how discipline drives the human spirit to triumph over odds of poverty trap, physical geography, fiscal trap, governance, cultural barriers, geopolitics, lack of innovation and demographic trap”.

Kambhampati (2004) argues that “development requires growth and structural change, some

measure of distributive equity, modernization in social and cultural attitudes, a degree of political transformation and stability, an improvement in health and education so that population growth stabilizes, and an increase in urban living and employment. From the above, it is clear to us that even though there are different perspectives to development, there is a general consensus that development will lead to good change manifested in increased capacity of people to have control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology; and obtain physical necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter), employment, equality, participation in government, political and economic independence, adequate education, gender equality, sustainable development and peace (Igbuzor, 2011).

Sustainable development therefore deduced from the above definitions and notions of development is seen as a sustained growth or change in the positive direction of man's life or wellbeing.

Igwebuiké sees sustainable development from a humanistic point of view. It is a humanistic economics According to how Prof. Anthony Kanu called it: *Igwebuikéconomics* (that is Igwebuiké and Economics) that concerns itself with the description and analysis of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services from a complementary perspective for the development of peoples. It understands economic realities not in terms of aspects, identities and static elements but thinks in terms of relatedness that systematically takes into cognizance the interactions of the different elements of social life, especially, economic structure, political structure, social structure and belief systems, with an awareness of the complexity and dynamism of relatedness (Kanu, 2021).

Igwebuiké's principles can significantly inform sustainable development strategies in Africa in the following ways:

1. **Community-Driven Development:** Igwebuiké advocates for development approaches that are participatory and inclusive. By involving community members in decision-making processes, development projects become more relevant, effective, and sustainable. This approach ensures that the benefits of development are equitably distributed, reducing inequality and fostering social cohesion.
2. **Resource Management:** The communal ethos of Igwebuiké encourages the sustainable management of resources. Communities that embrace Igwebuiké are more likely to adopt practices that protect their environment and natural resources, ensuring long-term sustainability. This principle can be particularly effective in addressing issues such as deforestation, overfishing, and land degradation.
3. **Social Welfare:** Igwebuiké emphasizes mutual support and shared responsibility. This philosophy can enhance social welfare systems by promoting community-based support networks. For example, communal child-rearing practices, support for the elderly, and cooperative economic activities reflect Igwebuiké's emphasis on collective well-being of all.

Research has shown that Igwebuiké has the potential to promote sustainable peace and development in Africa. A study conducted in Nigeria found that communities that embraced Igwebuiké experienced reduced conflict and increased economic growth (Ekeke, 2018). Similarly, a study in Rwanda found that Igwebuiké-based initiatives promoted reconciliation and social cohesion among communities affected by conflict (Mvukiyehe, 2020).

Furthermore, Igwebuike aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16, which emphasizes the importance of peace, justice, and strong institutions for sustainable development (United Nations, 2020).

### **Case Studies Of Similar Concepts And Igwebuike**

Several case studies demonstrate the effectiveness of Igwebuike in promoting sustainable peace and development. Here, the researcher will look at two case studies to buttress the point of this paper which include:

#### **Rwanda's Gacaca Courts in Peace and Conflict Management:**

The name "Gacaca" refers to the grass on which community members would sit to discuss and resolve disputes. In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda implemented Gacaca courts in 2001, a traditional justice system aimed at reconciliation and restorative justice (Mvukiyeye, 2020). These courts operated on principles similar to Igwebuike, emphasizing community involvement, dialogue, and collective healing. The Gacaca courts played a crucial role in rebuilding social cohesion and promoting national reconciliation.

The Gacaca courts of Rwanda, established in 2001, were a community-based judicial system designed to address the overwhelming backlog of genocide cases following the 1994 Rwandan genocide, during which approximately 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed (Clark, 2010). The term "Gacaca," meaning "justice on the grass" in Kinyarwanda, reflects the courts' outdoor settings where community members gathered to witness trials and participate in the justice process.

The Gacaca system aimed to promote truth, reconciliation, and accountability by allowing local communities to judge those accused of genocide-related crimes. It was a significant departure from traditional judicial processes, focusing on collective participation and restorative justice rather than solely punitive measures. Over a decade, the Gacaca courts processed nearly two million cases, with a conviction rate of about 65% for those tried. However, the courts faced criticism for not adhering to international legal standards, as many judges lacked formal legal training, and defendants often did not have access to legal representation. Critics argue that the Gacaca courts sometimes prioritized political agendas over genuine reconciliation, leading to a perception of bias in the trials (Corey and Joreiman, 2004).

Despite these challenges, the Gacaca courts played a crucial role in Rwanda's post-genocide recovery, fostering community dialogue and addressing the need for justice in a society deeply scarred by violence. They were officially closed in 2012, leaving a complex legacy of both achievements and shortcomings in the quest for national unity and healing (Thomson, 2015; BBC News, 2012).

#### **Kenya's Harambee Movement in Sustainable Development:**

The term "Harambee" means "pulling together" in Swahili, reflecting the movement's core principle of collective action and community-driven development (Hill, 1991).

The Harambee movement in Kenya embodies the Igwebuike philosophy by encouraging collective efforts for community development. Initiated by Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, Harambee has been instrumental in building schools, health centers, and other infrastructure through communal labor and contributions. This movement has fostered a sense of unity and collective responsibility among Kenyans. It is a self-help initiative that has played a

significant role in the country's socio-economic development since its inception in the 1960s (Mbithi, 1976).

The Harambee Movement emerged as a grassroots effort to address the lack of government resources for public goods and services, particularly in the education sector. Community members would come together to organize fundraising events, known as "Harambee drives," to finance the construction of schools, health centers, roads, and other infrastructure projects (Chepkwony, 2008 and Mbithi, *ibid*).

The movement has been particularly successful in the education sector, contributing to the construction of over 200 schools, 40 health centers, 260 nursery centers, and 500 km of rural access roads by 1993 (Chepkwony, *ibid*). The Harambee schools, in particular, have provided educational opportunities to many Kenyans who would otherwise have limited access to formal schooling (Hill, 1991).

The Harambee Movement according to Smith (2008) has also been instrumental in fostering a sense of community ownership and responsibility for development projects. By actively participating in the planning, implementation, and maintenance of these projects, community members develop a vested interest in their success and sustainability. Miller (2014) observed that the Harambee Movement was a unique and influential initiative in Kenya's post-independence development. While its impact has been subject to various interpretations, it remains an important symbol of African self-reliance and community-driven development.

However, the Harambee Movement has faced some challenges, such as the potential for misuse of funds and the uneven distribution of resources across different regions and communities. Additionally, the movement has been criticized for placing a heavy burden on the poor and for reinforcing existing power structures and inequalities (Smith, 2008).

Despite these challenges, the Harambee Movement remains an important aspect of Kenyan society, reflecting the country's spirit of self-reliance, community solidarity, and grassroots development. As Kenya continues to face development challenges, the Harambee Movement may continue to play a role in addressing the needs of local communities and fostering sustainable development.

### **Challenges And Opportunities**

While Igwebuikie offers a robust framework for sustainable peace and development, it is important to state here that it does not also come handy without challenges. Thus, like every other concept in use that stands in harmony with man's existence, has its own short coming. Below are the possible challenges observed:

1. **Modernization and Individualism:** The increasing influence of Western individualistic values poses a threat to the communal ethos of Igwebuikie. This cultural shift can lead to the erosion of traditional practices and social bonds as we know them to be.
2. **Scalability:** Applying Igwebuikie principles on a larger, national scale can be challenging, particularly in diverse and complex societies with varying cultural norms and values like Nigeria, where every culture wants to dominate each other due to lack of trust. This will lead to the igwebuiketic mirage of complementarity and unity amongst the different cultures. The true spirit that Igwebuikie carries will be watered down.
3. **Misinterpretation:** Because of the so-called suspicion amongst tribes and cultures, there is a risk of misinterpretation or oversimplification of the concept of Igwebuikie, leading to its inappropriate application or exploitation for personal or political gain as it

is experienced in Nigeria where a particular region of the country takes pride in promoting religious beliefs against other tribes for political gains.

However, despite these challenges, the opportunities presented by Igwebuike are vast. By integrating this indigenous philosophy into contemporary development strategies, African nations can leverage the strengths of their cultural heritage to foster more cohesive, resilient, and prosperous communities.

### **Recommendation/Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it is deduced by the researcher that one way to unlock sustainable peace in Africa is by fostering dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms that align with the principles of Igwebuike. If it worked in the Gacaca courts of Rwanda after the genocide, Igwebuike can be integrated into the justice system of nations, with a face of humanity. This can involve strengthening regional organizations, such as the ECOWAS, African Union, to mediate disputes and promote peaceful conflict resolution. Additionally, investing in education and awareness campaigns that promote the values of Igwebuike can help build a culture of peace and understanding among African citizens.

To achieve sustainable development, African nations must prioritize inclusive growth that benefits all members of society. The philosophy of Igwebuike which is complementarity, harmony and strength in unity, which is the ontological force behind the concept, can inform development policies that focus on equitable distribution of resources, empowerment of marginalized communities, and investment in human capital. By embracing the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental factors, African nations can pursue development that is both sustainable and beneficial to all going by the dictum in our local parlance that states “united we stand, divided we fall”.

Furthermore, the power of Igwebuike can be harnessed to address global challenges that impact Africa, such as climate change and global inequalities. By working together and leveraging their collective voice, African nations can advocate for integrated Igwebuike policies and initiatives that support sustainable development and climate action. This can involve collaborating with international partners while maintaining a strong commitment to African-led solutions that align with the principles of Igwebuike.

In conclusion, unlocking sustainable peace and development in Africa requires a holistic approach that combines conflict resolution mechanisms, inclusive growth strategies, and a strong commitment to the principles of Igwebuike. Igwebuike, with its emphasis on unity, collective strength, and communal harmony, offers a powerful framework for unlocking sustainable peace and development in Africa. By drawing on this indigenous philosophy, African nations can address contemporary challenges in ways that are culturally resonant and effective. The principles of Igwebuike can enhance conflict resolution, promote sustainable development, and strengthen social welfare systems, paving the way for a more harmonious and prosperous future for the continent. More so, by embracing the power of togetherness and collective action, African nations can build a more peaceful, prosperous, and equitable continent for all.

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