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## EVALUATION OF CULTURAL DYNAMICS IN GLOBALIZATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW

**Usman O.A. Michael,**

Email: usmanmichael@rochetmail.com,  
Cell No: +2202853380

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### ABSTRACT

*The initial hope and optimism that followed the end of colonialism in many African nations have given way to disillusionment and frustration, as these countries continue to struggle with the elusive promise of development. The post-colonial era has seen Africa and other developing nations inundated with messages promoting globalization and its purported benefits. Amidst this uncertain optimism, local communities' cultural values and identities are frequently ignored or misrepresented by international media, contributing to a growing divide between the Global North and Global South. This article, therefore, explores the impact of globalization on cultural identity and development in Africa, highlighting the challenges and opportunities presented by this phenomenon. It argues that while globalization has brought advancements in technology and communication, it has also posed threats to indigenous cultures and traditions. The paper emphasizes the importance of grassroots development approaches rooted in local culture and local community engagement. It submits that there is an urgent need for a more nuanced understanding and evaluation of cultural capitals and its role in shaping social and economic outcomes in Africa.*

**Key Words:** Globalization & Impacts, Communication, Culture and Grassroots Development

## Introduction

The euphoria and optimism that greeted many African Nations after the end of colonialism has turned into disillusionment and a complete mirage as many African countries are still grappling with the reality of illusive development. The post-colonial period has inundated the entire Africa and developing nations with barrage of information pressuring and intensifying the developing nations on globalization and its benefits. Again, while the trumpet of globalization is blaring louder and louder every day, the international media which are used in propagating it, do not reflect the socio-cultural values of the local people due to the trans-national flow of contents that are more or less strange to the locale. Hence, the horrible and abysmal gap difference between the north and the south has continued to widen. It is this imbalance created by the West that necessitated the writing of this paper.

### Globalization and Cultural Capital in Africa: The Gains and Loses

Today, we are overwhelmed with the barrage of all manners of information coming from West through international media organizations whose intentions have been to hasten the whole process of globalization. The world is now caught in the complete process of integrating the entire parts into one economically and culturally whole as series of cultural identities and values from the north have been let loose in the form of media messages, images, and cultural products and consequently, many cultures from the south are being negatively affected. This devastating influence of globalization has resulted in the erosion of several cultural values and traditions. The writer agrees that globalization refers to the growing interconnectedness of economies and cultures worldwide. Naturally, nation-states play a crucial role in this process by fostering the global economy to enhance their own economic position. Their power shapes and drives globalization, fostering deeper international connections and partnerships. It is a process that fosters an unequal distribution of the benefits derived from the exploitation of global resources, leading to uneven development. This has perpetuated existing power dynamics, trapping Africans in continuous poverty (Amin, 1976; Anikpo, 1996; Okechukwu, et al, 2022). The concept goes beyond just the economic aspect; it also encompasses its cultural dimension, which includes global entertainment, fast food, fashion, and tourism. As a result, cultural globalization is often seen as a reflection of Americanism (Hartley, 2002). It is increasingly seen as driving a cultural uniformity that is foreign to many societies.

This process, often disguised as globalization, entails the imposition of Western values on unsuspecting African communities, enhancing their economic development through American values and products that are continuously presented and promoted through media channels such as films, TV programs, enticing advertisements, music, and other culturally unfamiliar contents, slowly infiltrating African culture and encroaching upon its traditions (Daramola and Oyinade, 2015; Hartley, 2002). This view above has never been more manifested at any time in history than now that these ugly symptoms of underdevelopment have become normal phenomena in Africa and Third World countries.

## Literature Review

### Cultural Imperialism as Conceptual Framework

The theory of cultural imperialism originates from critical communication studies and was developed to explain the increasing global impact of the United States and its commercial media system. It particularly emphasized how US culture was being disseminated to, and occasionally forced upon, developing countries through US media and communication companies, specific media content and its imagery and messages, as well as the spread of the private media system model (García and Birkinbine, 2018). Therefore, this study is situated within the concept of cultural imperialism, which describes the process by which dominant cultures usually from economically and politically powerful nations impose their values, norms, and practices on less powerful cultures. Cultural imperialism, now rebranded as globalization, serves as the root cause of many challenges hindering African development. Evidence suggests that many Africans are heading toward a form of degeneration in various aspects of their lives. As Africans increasingly adopt Western lifestyles, embracing foreign ideals, knowledge, and values that conflict with their own rich and ancient traditions, cultural imperialism continues to erode the very fabric that once united them. This ongoing process fractures their sense of community, leaving them in conditions that threaten the survival of their history and heritage, potentially leading to a crisis of identity (Okechukwu, et al, 2022). This view sheds light on the uneven distribution of cultural products and the resulting impact of globalization on local cultures, which unfortunately leads to negative consequences for individuals in all aspects of their national lives.

Over the past 50 years, income inequality and wealth disparity have risen significantly worldwide. The current state of countries and the uneven distribution of resources among communities and individuals, based on fundamental human development indicators, reveal that

development has been highly unequal. Many experts and empirical studies argue that this development process has failed to benefit a large portion of the global population (The Economist, 2012; Melkote & Singhal, 2021; Stiglitz, 2012; Piketty, 2014). The United Nations' establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 highlights the stark disparities between global communities and individuals, even in essential areas related to human survival and well-being (Melkote & Singhal, 2021). Lamentably, Wilkins (2000:19) echoes the concern of many developing countries that:

...we now face a critical juncture. We are inundated with enthusiastic assessments of our shift from an industrial to an information age, where global knowledge takes precedence over national development. . . (But) serious problems such as poverty, malnutrition, overpopulation, inequality, and environmental degradation remain. Despite being designed to resolve these social problems through the strategic application of communication technologies and processes, development communication programs for the most part have failed to achieve their objectives... The burdens of global commercialization and development privatization have weighed heavily on the potential of development communication to foster significant social change

Wilkins' argument highlights the disillusionment and frustrations many developing nations feel, as they struggle with unfulfilled promises of development. The global exchange of information and communication products, often used to extend Western dominance, is a clear strategy for maintaining the dependency of developing countries on more advanced Northern nations (Sverny, 1995). This phenomenon functions in a top-down fashion, involving one-way transfers of technology, information, economic aid, and other resources deemed essential for development to the countries of the Global South. Cultural imperialism is a deliberate strategy aimed at exporting images and information to these nations, forming a clear and intentional component of U.S. global dominance (Sverny, 1995:15). As Cortes-Ramirez (2015) suggests, cultural hegemony goes beyond mere ideology; it includes the creation of shared experiences, the shaping of meanings, the establishment of values, the formation of worldviews, and the provision of moral, cultural, and intellectual guidance for society. He further expressed that the interaction between the Western or metropolitan world and the colonized ancient world, also known as the Third World, has shaped human cultural exchange since ancient times. The era of classical

imperialism continues to have a significant cultural impact today. Consequently, developing nations are perpetually relegated to inferior positions in a master-servant relationship.

The West harbors an unapologetic belief in propagating their culture to the developing parts of the world. This manipulation of cultural values, norms, and beliefs, facilitated by the influence of Western media and globalization, has resulted in the marginalization or misrepresentation of the cultural values and identities of local populations in Africa and other developing nations. The development of regional cultural products remains uncertain because foreign entities dominate both the content and distribution channels of communication (Meyer, 2008). This premise has provided insight into how the dissemination of globalization and Western cultural norms can influence societies' cultural identity and progress, leading to challenges like the widening gap between the Global North and the Global South. Meyer (2008:116) further reveals that:

"Modern cultural imperialism is largely supported by the revolutionary technological advances of the twentieth century. Working from a control-based strategy, it is possible for a handful of corporations to spread their cultural content around the globe. First, the control of technological hardware and know-how has been kept in the hands of developed nations through patent laws, economic barriers and the drain of talented individuals out of less developed countries".

Cultural imperialism diminishes the value of grassroots development efforts that are rooted in local culture and community engagement. These local approaches and strategies naturally act as a way to resist and challenge dominant cultural forces, while promoting authentic progress and long-term development. Cultural globalization, with its purpose of worldwide spreading of ideas, interpretations, and values, leading to the expansion and strengthening of social connections has become a ready tool (Giddens, 1990).

This phenomenon is characterized by the overriding adoption of cultures facilitated by the internet, popular media, and international travel. It contributes to the historical processes of trading goods and colonization, which have long been conduits for spreading cultural significance worldwide. The global North establishes hegemony not just through force, but also through consensus, thereby imposing their worldview and a set of norms and 'common sense' beliefs that promote acceptance of their dominance by the global South (Cortes-Ramirez, 2015; Gramsci, 1975). Cultural globalization entails the development of common values and knowledge that people link to their personal and

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group cultural identities. It fosters greater interconnectedness among diverse populations and cultures. The exchange of cultures allows individuals to engage in extensive social interactions that transcend national and regional boundaries. Globalization is a process that promotes an unequal spread of the advantages gained from exploiting global resources, resulting in uneven development. The creation and expansion of these social connections go beyond just material aspects. (Amin, 1976; Anikpo, 1996; Okechukwu, et al, 2022).

### **Globalization and Development in Global South: Africa in Perspective**

Communication is crucial to development because it fosters understanding, which serves as the foundation for progress, rather than merely transmitting information. (Waisbord, 2001:18). Communication is often described as a complex process involving the creation, transmission, and maintenance of information and ideas. It utilizes both interpersonal and mediated channels, which are supported by society's political, economic, and social frameworks. (Chitnis 2005, Melkote and Steeves 2001)

Lately, there has been a growing awareness within community development practitioners that the effectiveness of interventions and the potential for positive outcomes depend greatly on being deeply rooted in the local context, with culture playing a pivotal role (Ahearne, 2010: 16). In this context, the focus is on the culture specific to the area where the intervention occurs. The primary goal is to ensure the long-term sustainability of development and have a more significant impact on the community and its members.

In the same manner, Freire advanced the concept of liberating education conceiving communication as dialogue and participation. The goal of communication should be conscientization, which Freire defined as free dialogue that prioritized cultural identity, trust and commitment. His approach has been called "dialogical pedagogy" which defined equity in distribution and active grassroots participation as central principles. Communication should provide a sense of ownership to participants through sharing and reconstructing experiences. Education is not the transmission of information from those "who have it" to those "who lack it," from the powerful to the powerless, but the creative discovery of the world (Waisbord, 2001:19). Globalization has indeed expanded via alternative media, spreading news and cultural content worldwide (McQuail, 2010).

However, while mediated and dialogic communication approaches can coexist, it's essential to be cautious about whose interests are served by such a combination.

Communication is crucial in grassroots participation and development, extending beyond a focus on understanding community issues. It seeks to empower individuals by creating a mutually beneficial relationship between all stakeholders involved. (Nair and White, 1993). The duo also proposed that decisions should consider the contributions, active participation, and exchanges between community members and outsiders. This perspective challenges the common belief that knowledge should be passed from the 'all-knowing' to the 'ignorant, primitive people,' a notion many Africans have been taught. Freire's approach, along with other participatory models, promotes a human-centered method that highlights the significance of interpersonal communication in community decision-making (Waisbord, 2001).

Although the "old information order," rooted in ancient traditions that incorporate song, drama, and dance, has declined, this tradition persists in the village through its minstrels, balladeers, storytellers, puppeteers, and theater groups (Yadava 1993). The traditional folk media become greatly useful in revitalizing, utilizing and delivering messages intended for development (Nair and White 1993). No wonder folk media continue to exist in villages, revitalizing and delivering development messages despite declining ancient traditions. Ugboajah (1982) further revealed that folk media are rooted in native culture, created and enjoyed by members of a community which help reinforce the group's values. These cultural elements are often highly traditional and serve as visible markers through which social connections and a shared worldview are preserved and defined. Interpersonal communication channels and traditional forms of communication are quite vibrant, compensating for the limited reach of mass media in our society. More crucially, the interaction between mass media and other communication modes plays significantly shape a rich and effective process (Yadava, 1993). The tension stems from the conflict between maintaining indigenous, authentic cultural and social foundations and the appeal of embracing Western cultural and technological progress, especially in the age of artificial intelligence. Hence, globalization which is often described as a process of convergence and standardization across different areas (McQuail, 2010) is not without constraints to the global South where it spreads its arms influence.

Chitnis (2005) also resonates this as he states that communication plays a crucial role in enabling people to engage in development projects and is vital for organizing communities for collective action. Its significance in



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development extends beyond merely sharing information and ideas; it also serves as a tool that empowers individuals to take control of their own lives (Melkote and Steeves 2001; Chitnis 2005). Participatory communication itself is premised on the fact that power in a community is usually concentrated among the elites, and therefore needs to be devolved so as to achieve genuine participation.

Globalization has driven progress in technology, communication, and various aspects of our lives. To ensure inclusive development through communication technologies, all communication platforms must focus on increasing the participation of individuals, particularly those from marginalized groups, who have the necessary knowledge and skills to actively engage in and benefit from national development efforts (Yadava, 1993). Similarly, Nair and White (1993) further highlighted the importance of grassroots participation, collaborative planning, joint problem-solving, shared analysis, and an emphasis on action, setting participatory research apart from conventional positivist social science methods. The collective efforts of community members in grassroots development closely resemble African communal systems and cultural traditions.

Right from antiquity to the modern times, the development of any society has always been shaped by its cultural practices, which provide a sense of identity over time. People define their own identity, values, and material possessions, collectively calling these their culture. The preservation of this cultural heritage has had a profound impact on the nationhood and progress of the communities involved. Today, people across the globe are defined by traditions that have endured and evolved over centuries and millennia, thus safeguarding their cultural heritage. As a result, any development that comes to these communities must align with their artistic practices, or else a disconnect is inevitable.

### **Culture as an Enabler of Grassroots Development**

The role of culture in nation-building and development cannot be over-emphasized owing to its importance. Every nation is cultured by its people's identity and values. Culture defines who people are and their worldview. As the world has been caught and drawn into the web of globalization, there is the need to take an inward look and revitalize it in order to preserve many of the cultural heritages that are being drowned in the ocean of cultural globalization.

Culture-as-progress refers to a broad process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic growth, or a measure of perfection evaluated either through material advancement or by a set of elevated standards (Bennett et al., 2005; Stephenson 2023). It is crucial to grasp that culture is a core and distinctive way of life that includes thought, emotion, beliefs, organizational systems, living arrangements, survival, and development. It acts as the central repository for a society's collective knowledge and wisdom, passed down through generations. Culture serves as a framework for living, a creative process through which societies adapt to their physical, social, and intellectual environments (Okwori, 2013).

According to Okwori (2007), culture forms the foundation of identity, manifesting through shared language, history, ethnicity, and a sense of belonging. It is ever-evolving, not fixed, yet something identifiable connects individuals to their community's values and their unique existence, providing the basis for navigate and expressing their world. However, when these defining aspects are removed or replaced by more dominant cultures, individuals may become perpetual outsiders or secondary to the prevailing influence.

Thus, cultural capital which encompasses the intangible resources an individual holds, typically gained through upbringing and learning experiences equally plays a pivotal in the lives and development of any particular set of people. These resources comprise knowledge, abilities, behaviors, preferences, and societal norms, conferring social and economic benefits within specific communities or social circles. Cultural capital shapes one's ability to advance socially, access opportunities, and achieve success across different social settings, significantly influencing personal and professional outcomes. Theory of cultural capital has equally been likened to economic wealth since access to and possession of cultural and symbolic power generates and reinforces social distinction, (Hartley 2002:45). Popular cultural capital is understood as the accumulation of meanings and measures that serve the interests of subordinate groups (Fiske 1987:18). It has allowed individuals to develop their own identities through a contrast with dominant values, gaining power from their distinctiveness (Fiske 1987; Hartley 2002). The concept of "anti-globalization sentiment" has arisen in response to conservative doubts about the rapid spread and blending of cultural choices linked to globalization. From this perspective, locality is prized as a symbol of authenticity and national unity, prioritizing direct, personal interactions over mediated communication (Hartley 2002).

Thus, the UNESCO declaration that recognizes the diverse cultural practices worldwide, leading to a broad acknowledgment that culture plays a crucial role in human development is a good one, even though, there is

no universally accepted framework for defining this process. Over the past decade, notable progress has been achieved in comprehending the impact of culture on development. A key insight in cultural policy discussions is the productive potential of culture, mainly through the promotion of cultural industries. By leveraging cultural industries, culture becomes practically involved in fostering peace and sustainable national development.

There is a strong belief that cultures are both important collective assets of nations and regions, and highly susceptible to external influences (McQuail, 2010). Global culture can coexist alongside local and traditional communities, identities, and preferences, fostering a diversity of cultures and creating opportunities for the emergence of new cultural expressions (Hartley, 2002). What we are witnessing presently, however, demands caution, as historical precedent suggests that cultural blending between the West and developing nations has typically not been advantageous for the latter. According to Tunstall (1977), he disclosed that indigenous traditions and tribal cultures are facing displacement and erosion due to the overwhelming influence of Western media products, particularly those originating from America. These media outlets inundate people with commercial content, exposing them to lifestyles that often seem unattainable and unrealistic.

Language is another vital aspect of culture that should be taken seriously. Citing Whorf and Sapir, Hartley (2002) stated that language organized perception and that different languages organized the perception in diverse ways. In the same manner, Ojameruaye (2005) as quoted in Okwori (2013) also confirms that "language stands out as possibly the most crucial and defining element of any culture." The Centre for Endangered Languages emphasizes in its Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights in Barcelona (1996: 10) that "Language serves as the gateway to understanding a people. If we lose this gateway, we lose the essence of the people. A language that fades means a community lost, a community lost signifies a culture vanished, and a culture gone signifies a civilization lost. The wealth of knowledge and experience contained within is then irretrievably lost to obscurity.

### **Grassroots Development and Community Participation**

Grassroots development focuses on local communities leading the way in creating social, economic, or political change, instead of depending on outside organizations or authorities. It enables communities to recognize their needs, prioritize them, and create solutions that are tailored to their specific situation. According to Gbenga (2014), the progress of any developing society requires

the involvement of every individual, with each person contributing to its meaningful advancement. The goal is to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth by leveraging community strengths and resources, promoting ownership and participation, and addressing underlying issues. This approach emphasizes bottom-up decision-making, community involvement, and utilizing local knowledge and assets.

Community Participation typically requires using folk and traditional media with extensive community involvement, and performers who are often drawn from within the same community. This fosters the widespread dissemination of communication messages and cultivates community members who advocate for these messages. By utilizing familiar language or content that resonates with members' everyday experiences, these media channels enhance the likelihood of accepting and embracing community messages. As integral components of the socio-cultural framework within a community, these media sources hold higher credibility among their audiences or community members. Each form of folk art contains elements of indigenous content that may be challenging for outsiders to comprehend. The reflection of specific community cultural backgrounds fosters a sense of unity, making communication more accessible and effective for community members.

### **Conclusion**

This paper explores the intersection of cultural dynamics, globalization, and communication in grassroots development within the digital age. It contrasts the post-colonial optimism in Africa with the ongoing struggles for development, highlighting how globalization often marginalizes or misrepresents local cultures, deepening the divide between the Global North and South. While globalization brings technological and communication advancements, it also threatens indigenous cultures through the imposition of Western norms, fostering cultural imperialism. The paper stresses the importance of grassroots development rooted in local culture, emphasizing community participation and the role of

cultural capital in shaping social and economic outcomes. Communication is seen as a key tool for fostering understanding and mobilizing communities in development efforts. The article calls for preserving cultural heritage and integrating cultural sensitivity into development strategies. Ultimately, it advocates for a holistic, culturally inclusive approach to development that empowers local communities and ensures sustainable progress.

### Recommendation

In light of the evaluation presented on the cultural dynamics of globalization and their implications for development in Africa, the following recommendations are proposed:

#### 1. Promote Cultural Sensitivity in Policy Formulation:

Policymakers and development agencies should integrate indigenous cultural values and practices into development frameworks to ensure that interventions are contextually relevant and socially sustainable.

#### 2. Strengthen Cultural Institutions:

African nations should invest in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage institutions as key drivers of identity, social cohesion, and community-based development. This includes funding museums, cultural centers, language preservation projects, and traditional arts.

#### 3. Foster Inclusive Global Engagement:

Africa's engagement in globalization must be strategic and inclusive, ensuring that local voices and perspectives are not marginalized in favor of dominant global ideologies. Regional organizations such as the African Union should advocate for equitable cultural representation on the global stage.

#### 4. Encourage Cultural Education and Exchange:

Integrating African history, languages, and values into educational curricula can help build cultural confidence among youth. Additionally, programs that facilitate intercultural dialogue and

exchange can enhance mutual understanding and respect in global partnerships.

#### 5. Utilize Culture for Sustainable Development:

Culture should be positioned not just as a background element, but as an active pillar of development strategy. Harnessing cultural industries (such as film, music, and fashion) can create jobs, promote tourism, and contribute to GDP while preserving African identity.

#### 6. Conduct Further Interdisciplinary Research:

More empirical and theoretical studies are needed to explore the nuanced intersections of culture and globalization in various African contexts. Collaborative research across disciplines and nations can yield deeper insights and practical approaches.

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