

**EXPANDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA THROUGH INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE:  
A FRAMEWORK FOR IGBO INTERNATIONALIZATION INITIATIVES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Internationalization in higher education can play a major role in expanding sustainable development in Africa. Valparaiso University, located in Northwest Indiana, U.S.A., has been recognized as a leader nationally for its innovative internationalization efforts and programs.

This article highlights formation of the University's Africa Institute Initiative (AII) as a vehicle for internationalization and its efforts toward expanding sustainable development in Africa through intercultural exchange. First, the article addresses the context and definition of internationalization within higher education, followed by a brief overview of Valparaiso University's internationalization ethos. Next, as a foundational element for developing intercultural exchange, the article outlines the processes, mission, and goals of the University's AII. Finally, the article concludes with a summarization of Valparaiso University's AII as a framework for Igbo internationalization initiatives through intercultural exchange.

**Keywords:** Igbo, intercultural exchange, internationalization, sustainable development, Valparaiso University Africa Institute Initiative

## **INTRODUCTION**

Today, the world’s cultural landscape is inextricably interconnected. Higher education institutions can play a key role in using culture as a resource to build capacity and sustainable development worldwide. According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)—a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) that promotes collaboration among its member countries in the fields of education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, and communications and information (Blanchfield & Browne, 2013)—culture is central to sustainable development in that it is a “rich source of innovation, human experience and knowledge exchange which can assist communities and societies to move [toward a] more sustainable future” (UNESCO, 2009a, p. 2).

Africa’s moving toward a sustainable future necessitates building connections globally through intercultural exchange. The term “intercultural exchange,” for purposes of this article, broadly reflects the cultural interchange of knowledge diffusion imbedded within collaborative practices and community engagement with local partnerships, international stakeholders, and policymakers within an institution of higher education to advance internationalization. In recognition of its internationalization efforts, Valparaiso University is one of eight institutional members of the American Council of Education’s Internationalization Laboratory Cohort. Intercultural exchange, as outlined in this article, is a framework for using higher education institution partnerships to advance the revitalization, use, and study of the Igbo culture and language, both within and outside of Nigeria.

Igbo, also called Ibo, is an ethnic group of people “living chiefly in southeastern Nigeria who speak Igbo, a language of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014, p. 1). The Igbo people are grouped into five “main cultural divisions: northern [Onitsha], southern [Owerri], western [Ika], eastern [Cross River], and northeastern [Abakaliki]” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014, p. 1). This article describes expanding sustainable development in Africa through intercultural exchange as a framework for Igbo internationalization initiatives. This framework is important, because it correlates actualizing sustainable development goals through the use of culture, specifically intercultural exchange, as a vehicle for Igbo internationalization initiatives that maximize the use, development, and preservation of the Igbo culture and language, both within and outside of Nigeria.

First, the context and definition of internationalization within higher education for sustainable development in Africa is addressed. Next, examples of higher education internationalization partnerships in Africa, as vehicles for sustainable development are highlighted, followed by an accounting of the ongoing formation of Valparaiso University’s Africa Institute Initiative (AII) as an outline for intercultural exchange. Finally, the article concludes with summarizations of the correlation of Valparaiso University’s AII formation processes as a framework for Igbo internationalization initiatives through intercultural exchange and the significance of this framework in effectuating sustainable development goals.

## **INTERNATIONALIZATION: CONTEXT AND DEFINITION**

The term “internationalization” is referenced in this article within the context of higher education. Internationalization in higher education takes on many definitions and practices and has multiple goals. The National Association of Foreign

Student Advisers (NAFSA), renamed NAFSA in 1990: Association of International Educators Association of International Education—is the leading professional association in the field of international education that promotes the exchange of students and scholars to and from the United States (U.S.). NAFSA’s (2010) definition of internationalization provides the guidelines for practice, policies, and standards for curricular development and program implementation for most institutions of higher learning and policymakers. According to NAFSA, internationalization is defined in higher education as:

The conscious effort to integrate and infuse international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the ethos and outcomes of postsecondary education. To be fully successful, it must involve active and responsible engagement of the academic community in global networks and partnerships. (p. 2)

This context and definition of internationalization is relevant, because it connects intercultural exchange as a vehicle for sustainable development. The process of internationalization through intercultural exchange takes on many forms in the realm of higher education, including incorporating intercultural and international dimensions into the curriculum, along with teaching, research, and extracurricular activities (Henard, Diamond, & Roseveare, 2012; Marmolejo, 2012).

Internationalization efforts have expanded to include overseas branch campuses—programs such as distance learning abroad, international educational hubs and networks, curriculum change, and international institutional linkages for teaching and research (International Association of Universities, 2012). According to the International Association of Universities (2012), “the goals for internationalization are continuously evolving, ranging from educating global citizens, building capacity for research, to generating income from international student tuition fees and the quest to enhance institutional prestige” (p. 2). Henard, Diamond, and Roseveare (2012) contend that internationalization efforts matter for higher education instruction, because these efforts enable: a) an increase in national and international visibility; b) leveraging of institutional strengths through strategic partnerships; c) enlarging the academic community within which to benchmark these activities; d) mobilizing internal intellectual resources; e) adding important, contemporary learning outcomes to the student experience; and f) developing stronger research groups. Internationalization is an important means for advancing sustainable development through intercultural exchange.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Sustainable development is the overarching paradigm of the UN that is carried out by UNESCO. Founded on November 4, 1946, UNESCO is a specialized agency of the UN, with a mission to “contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information” (UNESCO, n.d.c, p.1). Imbeded in its mission are five objectives: a) attaining quality education for all and lifelong learning, b) mobilizing science knowledge and policy for sustainable development, c) addressing emerging social and ethical challenges, (d) fostering cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and a culture of peace, and e) building inclusive knowledge societies through information and communication (UNESCO, n.d.c). Based on this definition, the sustainable development paradigm is comprised of the following three pillars—society, environment, and the economy—with culture being an essential additional and underlying dimension (UNESCO, n.d. a, b, c; UNESCO, 2006, UNESCO, 2012). These three pillars are intertwined into “thinking about a future in which environmental, social and economic considerations are

balanced in the pursuit of development and an improved quality of life" (UNESCO, n.d. a, b, c; UNESCO, 2006, p. 10; UNESCO, 2012, p. 5). Although this definition is generally accepted, the concept and operationalization of sustainable development constantly evolves and varies, taking on different meanings from one continent to another, from one region to another, and from one country to another.

In addition to a definition, UNESCO outlines several principles of sustainable development for nations, regions, and communities. These principles encompass ideals, such as equity among generations, gender equity, peace, tolerance, poverty reduction, environmental preservation and restoration, natural resource conservation, social justice, cultural diversity, human rights, health, and biological and landscape diversity (Sollart, n.d.; UNESCO, 2006, 2012). The UN advocates education as a key factor in developing and expanding the engagement of sustainable development principles for change. That is why, in its 57th meeting in December 2002, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 (DESD), emphasizing that education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development. It also designated UNESCO as the lead agency to promote and implement the DESD (UNESCO, n.d.a). The goal of the DESD is to:

Integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning;" the idea being that, such an input will "encourage changes in behavior that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations. (UNESCO, n.d.a, para. 4)

Higher education institutions are important vehicles for carrying out the goals of the DESD. According to Higher Education for Development (HED, 2012)—one of the leading U.S.-based organizations that supports and facilitates the engagement of U.S. higher education in global development—higher education institutions play a major role in education for sustainable development (HED, 2012). HED was founded in 1992 by the six major U.S. higher education associations: The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC); the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU); the American Council of Education (ACE); the Association of American Universities (AAU); the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU); and the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) (HED, 2012). HED is also in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to support and manage the engagement of higher education institutions in developing innovative partnerships that join U.S. colleges and universities with institutions of higher learning in developing nations (HED, 2012; USAID, 2014). The next section highlights higher education engagement and examples of African sustainable development initiatives through internationalization partnerships and intercultural exchange.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Higher education institutions promote a broad understanding of sustainable development by building awareness, teaching and learning, and developing internationalization partnership opportunities that engage multiple sectors and stakeholders. These means create avenues within which to learn the values, behaviors, and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and positive societal transformation. Therefore, higher education institutions are crucial in sustainable development engagement, because

they play a key role in “fostering international development and human capital development and [the] institutional strengthening necessary for economic growth and social advancement” (HED, 2012, p. i). The allocated key role of higher education institutions in fostering sustainable development is cemented in the development of the United Nations University (UNU).

UNU is a global think-tank and postgraduate teaching organization headquartered in Japan. It was established in 1972 as the world’s first international university as a result of a UN and UNESCO feasibility study (UNU, n.d.). The mission of the UNU is to “contribute, through collaborative research and education, to efforts to resolve the pressing global problems of human survival, development, and welfare that are the concern of the United Nations, its Peoples, and Member States” (UNU, n.d., p. 1). In carrying out this mission, the UNU works with leading universities and research institutes in UN Member States, functioning as a bridge between the international academic community and the UN system (UNU, n.d.). The UNU has been working actively since the early 1990s in the area of environment and sustainable development, primarily focusing on the interactions between human activities and the environment, and their implications for sustainable human development.

According to the UNU, the goal of sustainable development in higher education is to “create a global learning space by facilitating networks and collaboration among universities and various stakeholders” (UNU, 2009, p. 7). The approach to embedding sustainable development has varied among higher education institutions (HEIs), with some institutions using strategies that are based on already established frameworks and models, while other institutions have “developed implementation frameworks specifically emphasizing the elements that are most important to the HEIs environment and campus” (Johnston, 2007, p. 3) and/or “incorporating sustainable development values and practices into their core activities of teaching and research, institutional management, operational systems” and integrating sustainable development “into different existing fields of study” (UNU, 2009, p. 6).

UNU maintains that HEIs have a critical and tangible role in developing the principles, qualities, and awareness that are not only needed to perpetuate the sustainable development philosophy, but that also improve upon its delivery. In response to this responsibility, there have been several attempts to secure commitment from HEIs toward advancing the principles of sustainable development. For example, The Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF) is the Secretariat for signatories of the Talloires Declaration of 1990, which has been signed by more than 400 college and university presidents and chancellors worldwide. ULSF supports sustainability as a critical focus of teaching, research, operations, and outreach in higher education through publications, research, and assessment (ULSF, n.d.). Jean Mayer, President of Tufts University, convened 22 university presidents and chancellors in Talloires, France, to voice their concerns about the state of the world and to create a document that spelled out key actions institutions of higher education must take to create a sustainable future.

The Talloires Declaration of 1990 is a historic 10-point action plan committing institutions to promote sustainable development and environmental literacy in higher education teaching and practice. It was created at an international conference in Talloires, France, and is the first official statement made by university administrators of a commitment to environmental sustainability in higher education. This declaration incorporates sustainability and environmental literacy into teaching, research, operations, and outreach at colleges and universities. More than 350 university presidents and chancellors

in over 40 countries have signed the Declaration (ULSF, n.d.). The Talloires Declaration of 1990 is significant in that it represents the commitment of higher education institutions to be a driving force around the world for promoting sustainable development's mission and principles. The next section highlights the role of higher education through UNU partnerships and USAID in promoting sustainable development in Africa through "inter-university partnership networks among African universities and abroad" (UNU, 2009, p. 10). This section explores sustainable development initiatives through what UNU calls "inter-university" exchange of knowledge and experience partnerships in Africa.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

According to Manteaw (2012), Africa, like most regions of the world, has embraced the quest for sustainable development as an urgent imperative. The UNU has been giving high priority to "inter-university partnerships" and capacity development, particularly in developing countries. In 2009, UNU collaborated with UNESCO and universities in Africa and Asia to promote inter-university research networks on innovation in education and development through a project titled Education for Sustainable Development in Africa (ESDA) (UNU, 2009). ESDA envisaged promoting graduate-level education for professionals to work toward sustainable development in Africa by building a network among African and Japanese universities under the auspices of the UNU (UNU, 2009).

The next sections provide examples of higher education institution partnerships between U.S. and African countries that promote sustainable development through internationalization as described within the context and definition of this article. The first two higher education institutions are briefly summarized to exemplify the general operationalization of internationalization sustainable development partnerships with U.S. universities in Africa. As will be shown, for the most part, these partnerships typically focus on sustainable development efforts by way of leveraging resources and facilitating information-sharing across regions (HED, 2012). The third U.S higher education institution partnership with Africa is more extensive, in that it describes the partnership between Valparaiso University and Nigeria, specifically the formation of the Africa Institute Initiative (AII) as a foundational element for effectuating sustainable development through the use of intercultural exchange. The formation processes of the AII provide a valuable framework for not only leveraging resources and information sharing between U.S university partnerships in Africa, but more importantly, they focus on the use and preservation of African, specifically Nigerian, culture and language.

## **U.S. UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS IN AFRICA**

### **Indiana University Bloomington and the University of Liberia**

Through a partnership between Indiana University Bloomington, the University of Massachusetts School of Medicine, and the University of Liberia, the medical library at the University of Liberia is adding health care textbooks to its stacks to better serve nursing students (HED, 2012). This partnership also tackled curricular deficiencies by creating a core health and life science undergraduate program and a joint four-year bachelor's program in nursing science to boost the University of Liberia's course offerings and the nation's capacity to meet its health care demands (HED, 2012). Through this partnership,

approximately 7,000 books were delivered to the medial library of the University of Liberia's A.M. Dogliotti College of Medicine (HED, 2012).

### **University of Ghana and Brown University**

A multi-faceted partnership between the University of Ghana and Brown University is helping to address obstacles to HIV/AIDS management in Ghana through educational offerings, training, research, and community engagement (HED, 2012). While attending the University of Ghana, students receive hands-on experience and learn practical approaches to responding to the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS (HED, 2012).

### **Valparaiso University and Nigeria**

Valparaiso University is one of five institutions in the U.S. that has been honored with the Paul Simon Award by NAFSA for Campus Internationalization. This award recognizes Valparaiso University as a model for other institutions of higher education in terms of innovative efforts and programs for campus internationalization by preparing graduates with strong cross-cultural skills and global awareness (Valparaiso University, n.d.a). The University was also featured in NAFSA's (2007) publication, *Internationalizing the Campus 2007: Profiles of Success at Colleges and Universities*, which recognizes institutions that are leaders in the growing effort across higher education to better prepare students for a global economy and an interconnected world (NAFSA—Association of International Educators, 2007). Additionally, in recognition for its current level of internationalization, Valparaiso University is one of eight institutions in the U.S. that has been invited into the American Council on Education's (ACE) 2010-2011 Internationalization Laboratory Cohort. The goal of the Laboratory is to prepare students to become citizens of a multicultural community by infusing international/intercultural dimensions into all aspects of teaching, learning, research, service, and outreach (Valparaiso University, n.d.b,d; 2011a; Heckler, 2009).

There are three area vision statements that capture Valparaiso University's ethos of internationalization:

- (1) Globalization—Valparaiso University will be acclaimed for the vitality of its international programs, which empower both U.S. and international students to lead and thrive in a global community;
- (2) Internationalization—Valparaiso University will be acclaimed for the vitality of its international programs, which empower both U.S. and international students to lead and thrive in a global community;
- (3) Regional Engagement—Valparaiso University will seize and create opportunities for service and leadership, engaging the regional community in activities and initiatives that enrich its social and cultural environment and that reflect the University's crucial role in economic development. (Valparaiso University, 2014, p. 15)

Valparaiso University's internationalization ethos allows for the exploration and mobilization of various internationalization initiatives, including developing the AII. Valparaiso University's AII provides a useful example of ways to articulate the linkages of internationalization through intercultural exchange. The next section outlines Valparaiso University's AII formation process, mission, and goals as a delineation of intercultural exchange.

## **VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY'S AFRICA INSTITUTE INITIATIVE: OUTLINE OF INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE**

Valparaiso University's AII builds upon the tradition of the University being a recognized leader in international education. The ongoing formation processes of the AII were aimed at further developing Valparaiso University as a leader in the field of African culture and exchange in the Great Lakes Region of the United States (Valparaiso University, 2011b). However, because of established partnerships with the Nigerian National Universities Commission (NUC) and relationships with various Nigerian governmental ministries and parastatals, the Institute's formation processes, as reflected, originated with the country of Nigeria. Notably, the Institute's mission and goals encompass the Continent of Africa in that it aims to "elevate the impact of African study to a new level and infuse the surrounding community with [a] greater understanding and appreciation for the language, culture, economy, and politics of the region" (Valparaiso University, 2011b, p. 1).

### **Formation of Valparaiso University's Africa Institute Initiative**

Formation of the AII extends Valparaiso University's internationalization efforts through intercultural exchange. This has resulted in mutually beneficial knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity that uses collaborative practices and community engagement with local partners, international stakeholders, and policymakers among University administration, faculty, staff, and the student body. This intercultural-exchange generated collaboration with Nigeria and the U.S., including faculty and administration from various universities in Indiana and Illinois, local and regional Nigerian community leaders/groups in Northwest Indiana and Illinois, the Mayor of Valparaiso, the Governor of Indiana, Indiana State Senators, the Nigerian Embassy in Washington, D.C., the Nigerian Ministry of Education, the Nigerian National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), the Nigerian National University Commission (NUC), as well as Nigerian consulate generals (Valparaiso University, 2011b). The formation processes of Valparaiso University's AII have provided opportunities for the University to liaise with partners within the Continent of Africa and in the diaspora to expand African culture beyond the campus, enabling the University to reach into local and neighboring communities and the overall metropolitan area through intercultural exchange with artists, schools, and business professionals. For example, to mark the continued progress towards establishing the AII on campus, in 2012, the University organized and hosted its first-ever Africa Fest. The goals of the Africa Fest were to:

1. Increase awareness and sensitivity of the Northwest Indiana community and Valparaiso University campus to African culture, highlighting the positive elements and contributions of African culture, talent, and arts to the world.
2. Bring visibility to Valparaiso University as an institution that welcomes and nurtures the exchange of ideas, talents, and traditions across cultures.
3. Set the stage for a series of steps that lead to the establishment of an African Institute on campus.

Additionally, in 2013 and 2014, the University hosted two events with the former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. The first event (January, 2013) was the Africa Institute Initiative Opening Ceremony Gala Dinner. The second event (February, 2014) was a Presidential Lecture Series in collaboration with the Nigerian Embassy in Washington, D.C., for the Graduate School and Continuing Education's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. Lastly, the formation process of the AII has provided opportunities for global reach and thinking within the University.

The University has also collaborated with government delegations and federal agencies from Nigeria, including Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation. For example, the Nigerian Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), charged with "harnessing culture for national development" (Nigerian Institute for Cultural Orientation [NICO], n.d.), played an integral role within AII's formation processes. NICO's partnership, as well as the AII initiative's mission and goals discussed in the ensuing sections, provide a framework for higher education institution internationalization efforts for expanding sustainable development in Africa through intercultural exchange. This framework is in line with UNESCO's definition of culture as an essential and underlying dimension of effectuating sustainable development goals (UNESCO, n.d. a, b, c; UNESCO, 2006, UNESCO, 2012).

### **Valparaiso University Africa Institute's Initiative Mission**

The mission of the AII at Valparaiso University is to promote the understanding of traditional and popular African culture and the arts, as well as foster commerce and business opportunities between Indiana and the African Continent by means of:

1. Bringing a strong sense of African culture and the arts to Northwestern Indiana communities, including various schools and businesses;
2. Strengthening the University as an exchange and resource center for the professional study of African commerce and culture among students, artists, business professionals, writers, and politicians in the region;
3. Providing financial (scholarship) and logistical support for U.S. and African students and faculty wanting to study in Africa and the U.S., respectively, particularly at Valparaiso University;
4. Promoting the understanding of traditional and popular African culture and the arts, along with fostering commerce and business opportunities between Indiana and Africa;
5. Planning activities that inform and prepare community organizations, businesses, civic groups, and residents for greater interaction with African institutions, organizations, and individuals. (Valparaiso University, 2011b, p. 1)

## **Valparaiso University's Africa Institute Initiative Goals**

The AII goals at Valparaiso University are designed to promote various activities, both on campus and within the community, including:

1. Offering seminars that prepare professionals and tourists for travel to and within Nigeria;
2. Conducting regular workshops within the Northwest Indiana community that address Nigerian policies and culture for various interest groups, including schools, business professionals (e.g., those doing business in Nigeria), local government officials, etc.
3. Hosting speakers from the Nigerian Consulate and/or experts who address Nigerian culture and business on the University campus for presentations and ceremonies.
4. Building a Nigerian collection within Valparaiso University's library, which serves as a resource for both the campus community and the community at-large;
5. Offering classes and organizing events around West African traditions and arts, including language, literature, art, film, music, cultural exhibitions, traditional Nigerian medicine, guest speakers, and more (Valparaiso University, 2011b, pp. 1-2).

The formation processes, mission, and goals of Valparaiso University's AII yield the importance of intercultural exchange as a platform for developing modes for expanding sustainable development in Africa by providing a framework for Igbo internationalization initiatives.

## **Intercultural Exchange: A Framework for Igbo Internationalization Initiatives**

According to James and Osuagwu (n.d.), “sustainable development could not be attained when the people are culturally deprived” (p. 22). Culture—“set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group, encompassing all the ways of being in that society; at a minimum, including art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs” (UNESCO, 2013, p. 10)—is imbedded as an important dimension of sustainable development (UNESCO, n.d a, b, c, 2006, 2012). UNESCO is called upon, under its 1945 Constitution, to “give fresh impulse to the spread of culture [and to promote] the fruitful diversity” of the world’s cultures (UNESCO, 2009, p. 26). In 1972, UNESCO adopted the “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage” in the forms of—beliefs, representations, celebrations, customs, social relations, and cultural manifestations—including oral traditions, the performing arts, and traditional know-how with respect to crafts or nature (UNESCO, 2009a, p.27). Intercultural exchange enhances the ability to improve intercultural understanding and promote the preservation and celebration of cultural forms and expressions for sustainable development.

Specifically, according to Manteaw (2012), sustainable development in Africa calls for “integrated solutions that are place-based and culturally responsive” (p. 376). Intercultural exchange can enable cultural responsiveness through the preservation

and use of language. For example, Azuonye (2003) maintains that “external” and “internal” factors affect language use over time, leading to: (1) reduced speaker competence, (2) rapidly decreasing child competence, and (3) repressive language policies (Azuonye, 2003, pp. 44-46). This has led some African scholars to sound an alarm regarding the preservation and maintenance of the Igbo language.

### **Igbo Language**

According to Azuonye (2003), “the question sometimes has been posed if Igbo, one of the three major languages of Nigeria, is an endangered language?” (p. 41). Azuonye (2003) asserts that the Igbo language is “in danger of dying” (p. 41). The Igbo language’s “danger of dying” may lead to loss of cultural identity. Woodbury (2001) states:

When a community loses its language, it often loses a great deal of its cultural identity at the same time. Language is a powerful symbol of a group’s identity. Much of the cultural, spiritual, and intellectual life of a people is experienced through language. This ranges from prayers, myths, ceremonies, poetry, oratory, and technical vocabulary to everyday greetings. (p. 2)

Woodbury (2001) maintains that, “it is very important to the community itself that its language survives” (p. 2). He further cautions that:

A people’s history is passed down through its language, so when the language disappears, it may take with it important information about the early history of the community. The loss of human languages also severely limits what linguists can learn about human cognition (Woodbury, 2001, p. 2).

Intercultural exchange helps to build an understanding of the varied experiences of diverse cultural and ethnic groups so that barriers across cultures are addressed and bridged. Further intercultural exchange, as outlined in this article through the formation of Valparaiso University’s AII, can be used as a framework by universities and/or agencies for Igbo internationalization initiatives to improve intercultural collaborations and maximize preservation of the Igbo culture and language within the five main Igbo cultural divisions of Nigeria: northern (Onitsha), southern (Owerri), western (Ika), eastern (Cross River), and northeastern (Abakaliki), and the diaspora. This framework departs from typical internationalization initiatives in that it offers a more comprehensive approach to sustainable development both for countries in Africa and in partnering with U.S. higher education institutions. Additionally, it edifies the role of intercultural exchange in advancing sustainable development, whereby African culture and language serves as a focal point of the University’s internationalization efforts. Through AII formation processes, Valparaiso University has successfully established partnerships with the Nigerian National Universities Commissions (NUC)—a parastatal under Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Education charged with the development and management of university education in Nigeria. This has afforded Valparaiso University internationalization efforts to reach several Nigerian universities, including—the University of Jos, the University of Benin, and the University of Calabar (Valparaiso University, 2011b). As outlined through Valparaiso University’s AII formation processes and internationalization efforts, culture is an important means of actualizing sustainable development in Africa.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sustaining development in Africa necessitates a multiplicity of approaches and the generation of innovative practices. Intercultural exchange, as demonstrated through Valparaiso University's AII, locates sustainable development in Africa within the context of internationalization through intercultural exchange. This has provided opportunities to gain insights into: (1) exploring multiple perspectives and approaches as emerging practice; (2) enriching cross-cultural practices and resources to enhance intercultural understanding and competency; (3) empowering community engagement through partnerships; and (4) fostering intercultural exchanges.

In conclusion, intercultural exchange, as outlined in this article, provides a framework for a collaborative process for developing partnerships with higher education institutions, stakeholders in Africa and the diaspora for knowledge diffusion, exchange of resources, and identifying opportunities for future action towards expanding sustainable development in Africa. More importantly, intercultural exchange as a framework for Igbo internationalization initiatives situates the Igbo culture and language as a central element for facilitating networking, linkages, exchange, and interaction among various stakeholders, fostering increased quality of teaching, learning, and research, which lead to rich intercultural immersion experiences, ongoing collaboration between higher education institutions, and various global agencies within the African Continent and the diaspora.

According to UNESCO (2003), intercultural exchange creates “opportunities for participants to learn, to prosper, and to work with others to solve shared problems and ensure a secure future” (p. 4). Therefore, culture is equally significant and important for sustainable development and is crucial for “the very survival of humankind” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 7).

Intercultural exchange fosters meaningful dialogue and a framework for effectuating sustainable development in Africa. The formation processes of Valparaiso University's AII are in line with its internationalization ethos and yields intercultural exchange as a focal thread imbedded within its goals. This intercultural exchange provides a valuable framework for Igbo internationalization initiatives through the research, training, and promotion of Igbo culture and language. Within this framework, African culture and language becomes the driving force for sustainable development. As demonstrated in this article, higher education institutions can play a key role in using culture as a resource to build capacity and sustainable development worldwide. Utilizing African culture and language creates a better means for a sustainable future in that according to UNESCO (2003):

We cannot understand and conserve the natural environment unless we understand the human cultures that shape it. Each culture possesses its own set of representations, knowledge and practices. Human action with respect to the environment, including management itself, is a social act and an expression of culture. (p. 8)

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