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Traditional Pottery in Ishiagu: *Cultural Heritage, Craftsmanship, and Sustainability in Igbo Society*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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Ishiagu Pottery Products

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The people of Ishiagu, who occupy the Ivo Local Government Area in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, are a subgroup of the Igbo people with a strong culture. They are highly skilled in pottery, and this pottery work is a big part of who they are in style and how they survive.

Pottery in this part of Igbo has been around for a long time, prior to the colonial period. Among the Igbo people, in general, findings like Igbo-Ukwu show that Ndi Igbo were skilled with their hands, even with clay. Ishiagu's pottery may not have all the big fame, but it still follows the leadership of that old tradition. They use it to construct pots for cooking, keeping water, or even for burial purposes—things people need every day. It's mainly women who do this work, passed down to them from their mothers or family, although men could help fetch clay and fire the pots.

How They Make It To make this pottery, they get clay in the ground—The area has plenty of good soil for this purposes. The locals approach riverbanks or low areas, bring the clay back, get it clean, and then mix it with water until it becomes soft but not too soft. It's all by hand, and they don't make use of machines. The clay is rolled into ropes, stacked up, and smoothed to form a pot. The tools being used are: sticks, a piece of calabash, or a stone to get the desired shape.

To get it fired up, they dry the pot in the sun for days first, after which they place it in a fire made with grass or wood. The fire hardens the clay, making it strong. Sometimes, small designs are carved on it

before firing; however, it's not too fancy.

Types of Pots They Make Ishiagu pottery comes in different types for different uses:

- **Cooking Pot (Ite):** A strong, big pot that can sit on the fire to boil yams or cook soup.
- **Water Pot (Mmiri Ite):** Usually slim at the neck so water inside it doesn't spill, used to store drinking water.
- **Palm Wine Pot:** A wide one used to serve palm wine at gatherings or for the purpose of fermenting.
- **Ritual Pot:** sometimes more refined but usually small, it's used for traditional practices like praying to ancestors.

The pots have a simple but nice look. They have smooth bodies with red, black or brown colours from the clay and fire—no paint or glaze on top.

What It Means for Culture and Money This pottery craft isn't just a means to work—it connects the Ishiagu populace to their old ways. You'll likely find it at weddings or when someone is about to be given a title. This craft also helps the people of Ishiagu financially. They sell it at markets or to nearby people, but now things like plastic buckets have made people buy fewer clay pots. Some try to make nicer ones for city people or visitors who still cherish culture.

This pottery work has challenges. The 17-year mining for lead and zinc that happened from 1965 to 1965, plus oil spills and pipeline issues, have damaged the land—it might affect where they get clay. Young people are leaving for cities for school or jobs, so they're not learning it as much anymore. But they're still trying to hold on—sometimes, at festivals in Ebonyi, you'll see Ishiagu pottery, and people who like Nigerian culture pay attention to it.

Ishiagu Pottery and Igbo People Ishiagu is the place most known for pottery in Igbo land, but they're not the only ones doing it. Places like Afikpo or parts of Anambra have their styles, but Ishiagu stands out in their area because clay is abundant, and they've been doing it for a long time. So, Ishiagu pottery is a sign of their skill and strength, even as times change. It shows they can make useful, beautiful things for daily life while keeping their Igbo ways.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chukwunwike Ossai

An enthusiast in tech with deep passion for studying and showcasing the vibrant cultural heritage of southern Nigeria . Combining my skill with my obsession towards African history and traditions to create contributions that impacts the digital space.



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