Harnessing Values for Social Transformation in a Pluralistic Nigeria: The Fears, the Tears and the Tasks

By

Osawaru, Osamede Christopher
Department of Philosophy,
University of Benin, Benin-City,
Edo State, Nigeria.
E-mail: chrisosawaru4@gmail.com, christopher.osawaru@uniben.edu
Phone: 08053638246, 08034158593

Abstract

Achieving social transformation in Nigeria is an onerous task in the face of her seemingly pluralistic nature and intractable problems of development. This is so because social transformation is value-driven. For any transformation to take place there must be a communal systematic positive growth, such transformation without doubt is usually frosted with challenges. This paper raises and discusses some of the challenges which bother on consensus on the definition and classifications of value on one hand and the nature of change expected, and the procedure to effecting change in a pluralistic environment as Nigeria, on the other. Leaving value orientation out of Nigeria's transformation agenda is tantamount to ignoring the latent functions of this concept in human society. No human society exists without a value system. The phenomenon is not a conservative force as some consider it to be in tackling social problems on the contrary. The aim of this paper is to show how values influence social transformation. The fact being that, social transformation emanates more from the value system of the people. This paper uses both the analytical and descriptive approaches. The findings in this paper are (a) that there is a downright disregard for the core values of our traditional society, which has led to high level of moral decadence. (b) That the family as a building block of the society is an endangered species, the position of this paper is that social transformation is not possible without imbibing right values.

Key words: **Harnessing, Values, Pluralistic, Social transformation,**

Introduction

The crisis of value system in Nigeria suggests that growth and progress of the society is being retarded in many aspects through outburst of materialistic tendencies of the generality of the citizenry. It is beyond doubt that materialism has taken over government, political institutions, educational institutions, invaded cultural and traditional institutions;

even our religious institutions are not spared. The malady of value crisis has predicted Nigeria as open society in which '*anything goes*.'

In Nigeria, we seem to be grabbing the worst and very little of the best from the rest of the world. This paper on harnessing values for social transformation: the fears, the tears and the tasks, is focused on suggesting ways Nigeria populace currently faced with crushing identity crisis, resulting from misplacement of values that led to the misunderstanding of the purpose of human life can be redeemed. It presupposes that the purpose of one's life must be far greater than oneself and each individual must therefore have a sense of 'community' beyond the inborn instinct of aggressiveness for self-survival against the society which provides acceptable ways of doing things so that others and the self may not be destroyed. This work stresses that Nigeria has a national culture that established her before materialistic invasion, the home remains the primary base for value formation and socialization along with value oriented education as well as religious process of redeeming the image of our national life in the future.

In other words, value is pervasive. From this premise, it could be admitted that any society without norm is not worth called a people. The reason is, values are standards which help society to clarify and sustain objective, goal and purpose of that group of people. Thus, right values are the signposts on the journey of enduring peace and fulfillment; they are our road markers along the way. Within the context of Nigeria's predicament, there is a need to seriously look inward to identify and evaluate our values as embedded in pristine African cultures as well as their potentials with a view of developing them towards the social transformation of the country, when these values are properly harnessed, it can bring about all-round development. Perhaps an analysis of the various key concepts in this research would guide an understanding of the subject.

Towards an Analysis of Values

The type of clarification that we seek to undertake here is absolutely essential because in philosophy what is sometimes called conceptual analysis serves two practical purposes. One, it is to help in providing us with an adequate understanding of the meaning of the words or concept we make use of in our discussions. The other is that since questions are crucial to a philosophical discourse, conceptual analysis helps us in posing questions not only about social facts but about reality as well. The truth is this: if we do not understand the meaning of our questions we may not know what counts as answers to them. So then, conceptual analysis aims to promote understanding and enhance our capacity to decipher, interpret and make sense of the meaning of words, issues and ideas. Be that as it may, we can now proceed with the clarification of the term "value"

All human societies have well defined strategies for social control which includes system of values, beliefs, norms and sanctions. The understanding of value prescribes what is intrinsically and extrinsically worthwhile.it also refer to traits or qualities that we consider useful, beneficial or worthwhile .It has to do with social conception of what is right and wrong and what 'ought' to be. Values are sole determinants of priorities among people's goals and objectives. 'Value' fall under a branch of philosophy called the Normative or Prescriptive philosophy. 'It is precisely on the account of its prescriptive nature that an ideal statement is subject to varieties of interpretation and application.[1] The word 'value' has multiple and often complex interpretation. This is because values are usually understood within different socio-cultural context. Secondly, values relate to persons, and persons are different and unique.[2] Values are one of the most important features that distinguish humans from brute beasts; they are the things that define who we are and what we believe. In the same way, our values are usually the basis for our personal ethics and beliefs.[3] In the words of Joseph Agbakoba, "the notion of value readily goes with preference because a thing or idea has more or less worth in relation to other things and ideas"[3] Families, groups or cultures have values that are largely shared by members. The values a group subscribes to identify the objects, conditions or characteristics that members of the group count to be important or worth pursuing. Individuals also have personal values that are unique to them.

Values are the "basis for the simplest and the most profound steps we take in life; they are the road markers along the way of life"[4]. This definition describes the pervasive guidance orientation of values. Again, value is seen as "the obverse of motives, the object, the quality, or condition that satisfies the motivation".[5]This is incentive oriented. Value is also seen "as a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available means and ends of action".[6] Here, values become standard instrument of directing social choices.

What can be deduced from the above definitions of values is that they constitute the very essence of the society as they are the original stuff which an individual imbibes, assimilates, deepens and realizes his or her actions in various ways both in private and public life. Again, values play a fundamental and primary function in directing the conduct, behaviors and attitudes of the individuals in the society. Values instill a sense of discipline, honesty and integrity in people. Understanding our values help us "to keep our priorities in the right order and our actions in line with our beliefs."[7]

Furthermore, values are seen as an appropriate finale to pursue. "Values are the desirable end which acts as a guide to human endeavor or the most general statements of legitimate

ends which guide social action" More so, "values are normative standards by which human beings are influenced in their choice among the alternative courses of action which they perceive"[8] As a concept, value features prominently in the philosophical, sociological, psychological, anthropological and cultural fields or discourses. Of course, a definition of values may pay attention to culture since every society has certain dynamism and core values which sustain it. In other words, values serve as the foundation upon which the society firmly stands. The terms: value, morality, ethics are sometimes taken as synonymous since they focus on the ethos, mores, customs and conventions, do's and don'ts of any social group or community. From the above definitions, there is the issue of different understanding of what constitute value.

Conceptualizing Social Transformation

Hornby (2000) said the word 'social' is used in connection to society and the way it is organized.[9] A society is a group of human beings sharing a self- sufficient system of action which is capable of existing longer than the life- span of an individual, a group being recruited at least in part by sexual reproduction or adoption of its members. In this perspective, Nigeria is a society. The word society extends to those who live together within a geographical location. In the context of this study, the Nigerian society is a domain of social change cum social transformation.

Transformation refers to complete change in somebody or something. It is a radical re-orientation of one's life.(whole transformation).In other words, a rupture with the past and acceptance of a new code of life, which is deeply ingrained or internalized, encoded and put into action or exhibited in character. In the context of this paper, society is something that must experience transformation. Human society is being organized through transformation with a sense of its former state, present state and future state. There is always the notion or need for a shift in direction away from dependence on its present state to either returning to its former or moving towards a future state.[10] In this way, transformation is a social process involving social change. This is a change that breaks existing culture. It encourages breaking of traditional mold and strongly engenders reversal of status quo. Transformational change means Nigerians need social surgical operation.

Igbo and Anugwom (2002) while referring to the Dictionary of the Social Sciences stated that social change is the significant alteration of social structures (that is, of patterns of social action and interaction), including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules and of conduct) values, and cultural products and symbols.[11]They further said that "social change is simply a variation from a previous state

or mode of existence. It connotes something that is markedly different from its original version"[12].The term social transformation is used both in religion and social spheres. Theologians call it 'revival'; philosophers call it 'reformation' while sociologists refer to it as social change. Transformation takes place within a social system exerting its influences on the individual as well as the group. A social system according to Igbo and Anugwom provides a general guide for behaviour and interaction among individuals and groups in the society. [13] The social system of a society is made up of all the ideal patterns of behaviour within that society. The notion of social system extends to sub- units in the society that is system in a system.

The Implication of Varied Perspective of the Meaning of Values

Although values may be universally recognized, differing meaning of values posed the challenge of a universally acceptable core values. This has played out in Nigeria's bid for social transformation. At various times in the past, it has dawned on Nigerians that all is not well with the country, Nigeria. In all aspect of human endeavor, values constitute an inextricable part of human existence. It dictates the choices man makes and choices influence the behavior of every man. The need for revisiting these aspects of human life is necessary because values have many implications on human conducts and actions. It is therefore necessary to evaluate the value system of the Nigerian society and our nature vis- a- vis the prevailing social situation the country find herself.

To a large extent, government has positive roles of promoting conditions that would guarantee corporative fulfillment of the pursuit of knowledge, variety of choices, training in skills and abilities as well as cultural opportunities in communities. It is a fact that in a just society, one does one's duty and receives corresponding benefits and all constraints are balanced with equal rewards for the individuals in the society. Indeed, the principle of justice is the principle of balance of constraints with corresponding benefits, but to what extent can this translate into social transformation?

The role played by the government in Nigeria as regards social rearmament and social reformation differs from regime to regime. A brief history of the various efforts by the government attests to the fact that most of these programmes could not survive because they are not value –driven. Programmes such as Operation Feed the Nation by Olusegun Obasanjo regime of between 1976-1979 did not yield the desired goals and objectives. General Muhammadu Buhari's program of War against Indiscipline (WAI) also did not succeed in bringing ethical revolutions among Nigerians. The benefits of the program were short-lived because it was not value-driven.

Successive governments have seen the need for social transformation but understanding what is wrong has not been the same. In Nigeria, work ethics has become subservient laziness which in turn introduced the citizens to get rich quick syndrome. The result is that money has been placed above integrity as work ethics is derived in the face of being smart, which is another name for fraud. Moral degeneration has heightened to a geometric proportion just as moral decadence has become norm in Nigerian society.

During Goodluck Jonathan's regime (2010-2015) efforts were also made to re-invent the wheel of ethical revolution. Then government was concerned about the image of Nigeria abroad and as such the nation should be repackaged. The solution as conceived by the leadership was to rebrand the nation. Bad image was the problem and repackaging was the solution. The methodology has been the same campaign for change so they came up with the slogan: "Nigeria: Good People, Great Nation".

However, that many Nigerians are serving various jail terms for sundry reasons, while some are executed for drug crime in many parts of the world is indicative that the slogan has not worked. What could be deduced from the initiation of such program was a response by the government to the harrowing experience of travelling Nigerians to other countries.it is rather a wishful thinking that international community can change their perception on our battered image just because we chant a slogan.

From the explanation above, it could be observed that Nigerian leadership over the years has seen the need for social transformation in Nigeria, national history of transformation has shown concern for economic and social change. But, the Nigerian experience has shown that there is poor recognition of value. The various approaches at social transformation have been problem -driven. Thus, we treat the symptom rather than the actual disease. The efforts of successive government have shown they perceive social problems without identifying the corresponding social values. Without identifiable value, the problem will be ill- defined. For enduring solution, every societal problem must be identified within the context of value.

Complexity of Harnessing Values for Social Transformation in Nigeria

The human person has imbued in his/her nature certain values, which when properly harnessed, can bring about the all- round development of the individual. In other words, the multifarious problems confronting the individual stand a chance of being solved provided the individual is able to draw insights from his natural values which can serve as impetus for appropriate motivation in his response to various challenges. The idea of values in the context of this paper is in the positive, moral sense that can be likened to what

the Greek Philosopher Aristotle describe as the '*arete*' by which he means those good qualities of the mind by which men live rightly, It is these qualities, according to Aristotle, that makes the possessor and his works good.

The list of what constitute values is indeed an unending one. Such a list would include honesty, dedication, simplicity, selflessness, justice, prudence, temperance and courage. The mere possession of these qualities does not however translate to transformation societally, "there is need for individuals to develop the necessary dexterity of looking inward not only to discover the abundant values possessed but how these values can be harnessed and made relevant to daily life; for the overall up-liftment and overall betterment of the society".[14] In my view, moral decadence means dissipation of values.

In the present day Nigeria, there is paucity of people who possess civic virtues and are committed to the well- being of others. The jettisoning of values or the ideals of probity, truth and justice accounts for why the nation has become the butt or object of ridicule of civilized nations of the world. The devaluation of values explains why the nation has been transformed from being a land blessed with great potentials to self-accursed(place)in which dispossession and alienation have become a permanent condition of the majority.it must be noted that without the value of morality and civility, the nation will become inchoate and fractured. Integrity is counted as stupidity as cutting corners is celebrated as acceptable lifestyle and many are involved with impunity.

We need positive values that are the road markers that will produce fulfillment and peace. The present negative markers of deceit, falsehood, lack of respect for the will of the people and quest for materialism at the expense of the people are not good for a nation that is seeking progress and peaceful future; there is therefore need for value-driven social transformation policies that is entrenched in the life of the citizenry. Suffice to say, legislation cannot produce this change, else our prisons would not have so congested, we have several laws we do not enforce. The solution is citizenship education but what will be the content of such curriculum is an issue. Religion also will be useful but how is this possible in a secular nation like ours? This poses a great challenge in harnessing value for social transformation in Nigeria. The Nigerian state cannot adopt any religion. Thus, concern for acceptable set of core values still steers us in the face.

Besides, it appears religious institutions have lost the ancient landmark needed to mold religious adherents. Different religious institutions litter the streets of our nation, yet moral decadence is on the increase. Apart from the issue of acceptable set core values to all, there is the concern of the so called moral institutions in Nigeria having conformed to present

societal malaise. To effect an enduring change, transformation is needed which means we must think out of the present box or cast. The way forward lies in the understanding of what should be transformed.

The Way out of the Challenges of Harnessing Values for Social Transformation

It is important for any society who wants to proceed meaningfully to first of all take stock of its own identity by discovering its values which are the life blood of any humane community. These values are normally expressed in a people's beliefs and thinking about the human person, community, authority, the world, and God. Presently in Nigeria, our society is characterized by high level of distrust, suspicion, and everybody has become a suspect of mis-placed value. Immorality and lack of sanctity of life have increased as murder, ritual killings and kidnapping have become daily occurrence that pervaded the society with infanticide, fratricide, patricide, matricide, and suicide in pursuit of materialism.[15]

The malady of mis-placed value and devaluation of values has polluted the personality of most Nigerians, no doubt why seemingly responsible Nigerians within the corridor of powers gather around themselves sycophants and praise singers. It is worrisome, in that those who dare to criticize the ugly trends are faced with open harassment or veiled security. It is regrettably that vices have taken that place of virtue and merit is scarified.

The way out of the present predicament of mis-placed value is to understand that social transformation must be total. Transformation is an inside - out irreversible alteration of the mind. The mind must be constantly worked upon and it should be renewed through constant education. Human mind is capable of change and renewing is the method. However, one must delineate *renewing* as a method of transformation from indoctrination and radicalization. "Indoctrination is to teach someone to fully accept the ideas, opinions and beliefs of a particular group and not to consider other ideas, opinions and beliefs". The problem is that content of indoctrination may not be value –driven as such, rather, it could be parochial.

The fact that indoctrination shuts the door to other ideas makes it difficult for general acceptance outside a particular group. Thus, indoctrination fulfills the quotient of conformity and not transformation. Radicalization on the other hand is to "teach extreme views that are not shared by most people" this is being used by terrorist across the globe. Both methods considered focus on the minds with a view to producing socially unstable individuals. The question is to what extent have these methods succeeded in producing humans that have holistic understanding of the imperative of values? The social

transformation needed by Nigerians cannot be achieve through indoctrination and radicalization but through education of the mind and this must be continuous and not just "a once and for all" exercise.

Again, the fact that "values are the basis for the simplest and the most profound steps we take in life as humans and these steps enables us to know the right way from the wrong one and they serve as compass" means Nigeria can get out of the moral malaise only by imbibing the values appropriate to the problems we seek to resolve. Therefore, societal problems must be approached in the light of the values that have been breached, ignored or absent out rightly.

Values instill a sense of discipline, honesty and integrity in people. The absence of it and devaluation of it in the lives of the people will lead to placing self-interest pursuits above the well-being of others, which will be a diminution of the institutions of the society. When this happens the nation will become 'an instrument of the subversion of the people's interests, rather than being an instrument for progress and development. The result will be competition, conflict and a devaluing of the social order, all evident tokens of the moral dissoluteness of society'.[16]

Nigerians must change from being just problem conscious which is the present practice to value consciousness. "If our decisions are truly guided by values, we are more likely to find harmony within ourselves, our homes and families, our neighbourhood and nations". Therefore, the need for certain norms or standard for ethics must evolve, there must be certain normative values to drive national social transformation. We should realize that values are enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence, this indicate that value is a thing of choice but it is expedient that Nigeria agree on certain values that can bring about social progress as a matter of urgency.

Conclusion

This paper has examined some of the challenges in the process of social transformation in Nigeria. The fact that value is amorphous has opened its different definitions and lack of acceptable set core standards. The paper has also identified Nigeria experiences in social transformation to be problem identification oriented, that is previous efforts were made in resolving perceived problems rather than seeking to entrench values that are instrumental to societal growth. This seems to have affected the expected results of the various social transformation policies and programs.

As a way out of various challenges confronting the nation while trying to harness values for social transformation, we should go beyond the lip-service show, we should rather focus on values that are natural and will bring about collective success rather than personal achievement, we should emphasize accountability to one another as Nigerians, love and protection of the family and family name, hospitality as part of our societal life, we must imbibe the positive values that was founded on peoples life of chastity, prudence, temperance, peace, justice and courage, the interest in public good and purposes. The benefits of harnessing positive values and the possibilities they provide are very auspicious. For instance, prudence is needed in order to develop the capacity for large scale planning, while temperance is required for a man to be focused and not be deflected from longtime goals. Courage of course is needed to persevere in the face of setbacks and weariness, while justice is needed is needed to secure mutual trust among members of the society.

The central point of this discourse so far is that of trans-valuation of values. There must be a commitment to the welfare of the people that we interact with in the larger society; this will definitely affect the commitment of everyone towards one another. And for Aristotle, "the good life is nothing but a life of happiness and human well-being". Here we see the connection between political philosophy and social philosophy as an intellectual enterprise. Both aim at nothing but the enhancement of human welfare. The cardinal principle behind any ethical or moral ideal is respect for human dignity and welfare.

The point here is that morality aims among other things to promote our personal happiness and the happiness of our fellow humans. A proper training in morality, then, is necessary to help us appropriate the right personal values or civic virtues that are essential to ensure human well-being and flourishing. A counterpoise to this argument is that, the absence of the appropriate moral framework could lead to atrophying of the social order. The lack of honesty, the disposition to unlawful acquisition, falsehood, hatred, jealousy and lust for power are things that limit human solidarity or camaraderie. These vices if not gotten rid of, have the potential to scuttle all efforts at social progress in the human community.[17]

References:

Njoku, D.I, ''Ethics of value theory in our society: A case study of Nigeria'', *Ebonyi State University Journal of Education* (EBJE) 4 (1) Faculty of Education March, 2006,p.8

Nwigwe, B.E. "Aspects of our Nigerian Value System Philosophically Evaluated' 'Academia: A CIP Journal of Philosophy 1,(1) 2003,p.95

Agbakoba,J.C.A, "Personal Values and Democratic Ethics" in Olusegun Oladipo and A.B Ekanola(eds.).*The Development Philosophy of Emmanuel Onyechere Anyiam –*

Osigwe,Vol.1.Personal Values. Personal Awareness and Self-Mastery.(Ibadan: Hope Publications,2009.p.30

Olajide,F. "A Christian Perspective of the Challenges of Harnessing Values for Social Transformation in a Pluralistic Nigeria" in *Journal of African Society for The Study of Sociology and Ethics of Religions,* Vol. 2, December 2017,Pp.79-100

Ajere, O and Oyinloye, O.A, "Perspectives of Youths on the Interiorization of Core-societal values in the Nigerian society" in *Akungba Journal of Research in Education* (1) 179-194. 2011.

Njoku, D.I, "Reorientation of value system in Nigeria: A critic" in *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social sciences,* vol. 3, No. 11, Pp, 25-32, November 2015.

Agunlana,C. "Personal Moral Values and Economic Development" in Dipo Irele and A.B Ekanola(eds.).*The Development Philosophy of Emmanuel Onyechere Anyiam – Osigwe,Vol.3.Economic Existence, Awareness and Responsibility Personal Awareness.*(Ibadan: Hope Publications,2009.p.6

Okoh, J.D. (2003) *Philosophy of Education(The Basics*).Pearl Publishers,2003,p.79

Hornby, A.S. (2000) *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, New York: Oxford University Press

Imaekhai, F.J. ''The Nigerian Society and Ethical Revolution' 'In C.O Isiramen, F.J Imaekhai and B.O Igboin (eds.*)Religion and the Nigerian Nation: Some Topical Issues*, Ibadan :En-joy press and books.2010,p.50

Igbo, E.U.M. & Anugwom,E., *Social Change and Social Problems: A Nigerian Perspective*, Nsukka, Nigeria A.P Express.2002,p.20

Ibid.

Ibid.

Osigwe Anyiam Osigwe Charles, *Introspection and Integration As Effective Strategies For Development*(herein after called *Introspection* and *Integration*),Lagos: Osigwe Anyiam-Osigwe Foundation,2005, p.6

Osawaru,C.O (2017) "Loss of Moral Values As The Foundation of Corruption in Nigeria:A Reflection", in *SWEM Journal of Religion and Philosophy*,7(1),37-45,December.

Agunlana,C. "Personal Moral Values and Economic Development" in Dipo Irele and A.B Ekanola(eds.).*The Development Philosophy of Emmanuel Onyechere Anyiam – Osigwe,Vol.3.Economic Existence, Awareness and Responsibility Personal Awareness.*(Ibadan: Hope Publications,2009.p.6

Ibid. p.16

.