

Re-Orientation of Moral Value System in Nigeria: The Roles of Women as Change Agents

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ABSTRACT

The re-orientation of value system in Nigeria is a look into the past for national culture that would reshape national character and image. This work, therefore, examines the value system in Nigeria in pre-colonial era and Colonial period. This work on re-orientation of value system is focused on redeeming Nigerian society currently faced with crushing identity crisis, resulting, from misplacement of value that led to misunderstanding of the purpose of human life through the role of women in the society. The study reveals that values have either positive or negative effects on the social, economic, political, and cultural lives of the society. In order to avert the ugly implications of the debased values system in Nigeria. It recommends among others investment in women's participation in community relations and community development. In addition, the National Orientation Agency should embark on re-orientation campaign and enlightenment on the effect of debased values in the country.

Keywords Re-Orientation, Value system, Women,

INTRODUCTION

Every human society has specific characteristics of its people that distinguish the inhabitants from other society. The Nigeria value system is the beliefs, standards, principles about the right and wrong in the society. Value dictates the choices man make and choice in turn influences the behaviour of every man in the society. The value system of any human society determined the level of development. Like most aspects of culture, the value system is non-material. Compared to culture and norm, it varies according to society over time. The core value of the Nigeria society was discipline, honesty, hardwork, accountability, loyalty, respect for the elderly, truthfulness etc. The national values transcend ethnic or religious faith and are concept that embody who

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we are as a nation. It is the value system that shapes the perception and beliefs of the people. Our values impact on every aspect of our life; religion, relationships, career, and character. They determine what we think, say or how we act. It is therefore imperative to draw the flashlight on the re-orientation of the value system of the Nigerian society vis-à-vis the decadence in the society and the probable role of women to curb the menace. According to Okoh (2003), value connotes something important that is qualitatively cherished: something that provides satisfaction or sense of accomplishment”. Okpilike (2010) views values as ones principles or standards, and judgments of what is valuable and important to life. According to Hill (2004), values are the priorities individuals and societies attach to certain beliefs, experiences and objects, in deciding how they shall live and what they shall treasure. Enu and Esu (2011) note that values are basic beliefs and attitude in a society whether of individuals or groups which are considered worthwhile and serve as a guide to choices and behaviours in our daily life. Value thus implies acceptable standards, ideal way of doing things and living virtuous life in society. Values therefore are deep seated beliefs that influence people’s actions and behaviours. Okoh (2003) identifies various types of values to include the following: Religious Moral, Aesthetic, Social, Cultural, Intellectual and Economic. The concern of this study is, however, on moral values. Moral values are honesty, liberty, justice, brotherhood, neighbourliness, among other morals. It is a matter of conscience. It is the conscience that makes an individual considers the effects of what he is planning to do on the other people. These values guide man’s conducts towards his fellow man.

Nigeria Traditional Value System In The Pre -Colonial Society

Nigeria has been in existence before the colonial era, with its own distinct cultural beliefs, values, norms and practices despite diverse ethnic groups. The traditional society in Nigeria before colonial era were controlled by norms whose enforcement (sanctions) worked to maintain order in society. Aseka (2010) observes that “African communities are linked by shared values that are fundamental features of African identity and culture.” Values are transmitted from one generation to the other through verbal and non-verbal means. For centuries, these values were central to the society at large.

These value structures were used to ensure and promote order of socialisation and morality in the Nigeria society. A look at the traditions of most of societies that now constitute Nigeria would reveal unsurprisingly that all of these societies were value based. The Nigerian traditional values system before colonialism was outlined by Ella (1992) as respect for elders, chastity among women folk, dignity of labour, patriotism to one’s community, courage and self reliance. Cutting across all these traditions are values such as honesty, hard work, respect for the elderly, integrity,



truthfulness, chastity, hospitality etc. As observed by Ella (1992), Nigerians in the past era before the advent of colonialism, among other things attach great importance to family name. The urge to preserve and promote the family name was a priority in the heart of all. Honesty and hard work were held in high esteem. Virginity was held in high esteem. Virginity attracted an increase bride-wealth and a reward to the mother of the bride. Children were taught and encouraged to respect their parents and elders, assist them in domestic activities, such as fetching of water, cooking etc. Any child who disrespects any of his or her elder irrespective of the gap in age or seniority is seriously punished by the community. The traditional value system may not be perfect or the most ideal, but they kept the society moving without the disarray and disorganization experienced in the modern-day Nigerian society.

Aspects of Nigeria's Debased Values In Modern Era

The conquest and amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 brought the different ethnic groups under a single entity. Unfortunately, the eventual penetration of western culture and civilization and subsequent upsurge of globalization are threatening to erode these well established values and practices of the Pre-colonial period. The impacts of foreign ideas and technological influences have made Nigeria an open society where any "thing goes". Every society has its own values, there is nothing wrong in copying the western values but not to the detriment of our core values. As it can be observed, these cherished values in pre-colonial era began getting ended and the paradigm shifted as Nigeria slipped away generally for those values, and embraced entirely new cultural value system bedeviled by social vices. However when a society adopts the bad values such as materialism, greed and nepotism, the resultant effect is the kind of tragedy that has befallen nations such as Nigeria. A new cultural value began to affect the garments of our traditional morals and values. The Western values, cultures penetrated through all facets of human life and activities.

The alteration of the Nigerian society towards westernization and globalization and its social changes greatly disrupted most traditional institutions such as the marriage and family system. Marriage and family are two concepts in one which are at the center of the Nigerian society. There are seen as the foundation of human existence, honored and considered to be sacred. Marriage is regarded as the union of a man and woman. The societal expectations of marriage is high because the failure of marriage spelt doom for the children, which may result in the disruption of the transmission of traditional norms and values, beliefs, knowledge and practical skills to the members of the society. Today, the family system value has been neglected and abandoned, and has led to the current upsurge in separation and divorce cases which are not part of



Nigerian understanding of marriage. Divorce was a rare issue in traditional Nigeria society. And this had a multiplier effects on our social values. Some of the areas of Nigeria's debased values is dominated by indiscipline, materialism, lack of respect for the elderly, greed, cheating, stealing, fraud and corruption in all forms. The quest for accumulation of wealth is responsible for the high rate of corruption in Nigeria. Accumulation of wealth has influenced the age-long contentment for wealth. People acquire wealth enough for their lifetime, their children, grand children unborn. Schaefer (2005) captures the scenario well by stating that those at the top of the social hierarchy:

“Typically convert part of their wealth into ‘conspicuous consumption’, purchasing more automobiles than they can reasonably use and build houses with more rooms than they can possibly occupy. Or they may engage in ‘conspicuous leisure’, jetting to a remote destination and staying just long enough to have dinner or view a sunset over some historic locale”.

The greed for money and material things has worsened the social ills in society. Everybody wants to get rich without any useful means of getting income. Armed robbery, kidnapping and militancy are the order of the day. As observed by Nwauzor (2004), a new dimension of the get-rich syndrome is in the use of information technology to defraud people. Cybercrime is an institutionalized crime involving different age groups mostly youth. The get-rich syndrome has further been entrenched into the social system by the quest for titles. The more titles you have, the more you command respect in society. Such values as chastity and retainment of virginity before marriage are still upheld by religious organizations. Values regarding virginity and chastity are changing as a result of diffusion of lifestyles. Virginity is a mark of purity and honour to a girl and the family; a criterion for getting married had been taken with levity. Virginity is de-emphasized and its loss necessary for ensuring better sexual performance in the girl. Thus, marital and extra-marital relations are affected. Decadence in moral is an obvious consequence of this change in value.

The Role of Women

Women can be describes as an indispensable group in any nation. The 1991 population census report estimates the number of Nigeria women to 44 million. Awe (1990) states that the importance of women from their role are managers of homes. She notes that the peace and stability at homes depend largely on the managerial abilities of women folk. She further reiterates that women, especially the mothers, plan, organize, direct and coordinate all the resources of the home- both human and materials to the benefits of all the members of the family including the husband. Bull (1980) states that



the family unit is the primary focus of value re-orientation informed by parental roles, goals, values and manners that influence the children moral and social behaviour that influence the children. Thus the effective management of the homes promotes the core value system but whenever this is absent the contrary is usually the situation. Socio-cultural values evolve from the family. It is in the family that socialization process takes place where the parents are role models. Thus, any deviant behaviour brings shame to the entire family. The family is the custodian of virtues of truthfulness, honesty, respect for the elderly, discipline, temperance, hard-work, sanctity etc. Charity, they say begins at home. Therefore a good home training is *sine-qua-non* for overall child's development. This is because the home is the first teacher to any child. Although as the child grows, other people around get involved in the training of the child.

The women should ensure proper training and upbringing of the children and youths from an early age in order to serve as an instrument of change in the society. As stated by Ogunmuyiwa (1979), the source of moral education which include obedience to parents, honesty, humility, courtesy which are elements of good home training. Moral education provides the children with integrity, discipline, hard work and transparency. These values would eradicate the "new values" like greed, dishonest behaviours etc which are predominating in the society now. Morality is an ideology per excellence that is needed for re-orientation of the country's core value system. The women should ensure that God's consciousness is entrenched in the hearts of the children. So as to form godly consciousness that regulates people's behaviour.

Throughout history we have witnessed numerous examples of how women's participation in the social, economic and political life of their communities results in positive change. In the pre-colonial period, there were a number of great women who were able to distinct themselves as change agents in their generation. Women like Queen Amina of Zaria in Northern Nigeria is a legend among the Hausa people for her reign ushered in a new era for the state. In the Yoruba land, the most famous warrior was Efunsetan Aniwura who rose to become Iyalode or leader of women in Ibadan whose business acumen has given her undisputed influence not only in commerce but also in political and social life. Moremi of Ife, was a very brave and beautiful woman who, in order to deal with the problem facing her people, offered anything she had in sacrifice to the spirit of river Esimirin so that she could discover the strength of her nation's enemies. This sacrifice for her people speaks of selfless leadership that are bereft of these day. The history of Igala kingdom would not be complete without the important role of Princess Inikpi, whose selfless commitment and sacrifice to the course and survival of the Igala Kingdom remained a unifying factor in Igala land and Emotan of Benin. By their actions, they were able to save their societies from insecurity and the



vagaries of war. They were able to take the role of women from the background to limelight. Thus, they contributed to creating the needed change in their generation. Women have always been agents of change in their communities and beyond. According to Bolanle Awe, these women could rightly be called “the saviours of their societies (Awe, 1992). Dantiye and Garbe (1991) list the common features of Nigeria women as follows:

- (a) Tolerance and Endurance.
- (b) High need for association
- (c) Frankness in matter they considered serious.
- (d) Persuasiveness.
- (e) Consideration and fairness
- (f) Stubbornness to a belief
- (g) Emotional stability, and
- (h) Forgiveness.

These features of the Nigerian women are ingredients needed to take Nigeria out of the moral decadence. Thus women are capable to contribute their quota to the re-orientation of value system in Nigeria. Adefarasin (1987) asserts that in order to change a country’s vision and its sense of direction, the peoples orientation is needed to be changed. As stated by her, women are the needed agents of change, since they influence the children, the family and the nation at large.

Problems Militating Against the Attainment of Women as Agents of Change

Women are aware of the challenges that need to be addressed which included multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination emanating from their status as women has been a common feature in Nigeria. Regardless of these positive examples, change has been slow and there is still much progress to be achieved, especially since women continue to be underrepresented in the society. Socio-economic obstacles, long standing cultural stigmas, discriminatory or barred from the decision-making processes which directly affect them and the community. Stereotypes of being uneducated, powerless and oppressed continue to influence the treatment of women in Nigeria.

Customs and traditions of the societies serve as deterrents to women playing their roles as agents of change in Nigeria. Briere (2004) identifies socio-cultural factors such as poverty, social inequality and inadequate social supports as some of the variables that combine to determine the seriousness of the impact of violence against women. Women have faced lot of barriers to their full attainment as change agents due to the entrenched cultural and religious attitudes which has hindered them. Gender discrimination is deeply rooted in the society which has false belief that women are inferior and weak,



compared to their men folk. These beliefs that women are valueless, weak, etc has rendered them powerless and inactive. They are seen as dangerous beliefs and threats that can prevent the woman from performing at their ability in a domain that is important to them.

Inferiority complex syndrome has been rooted in the mind set of an average Nigerian woman. The mentality that men are better in all spheres of life is dragging women backwards. There is no self belief and confidence. They do not believe that they can achieve anything independent of men. The domineering nature of Nigerian men has affected the attainment of women as agents of change. As a result of the Africa setting, women are seen as part of men's belongings, property or a chattel at the extreme. Therefore they do not worth to be seen or heard in the society. Ignorance represents a powerful challenge to the women in their role as change agents. Ignorance does not only have to do with the illiterate women but with the illiterate women not aware of their roles as role models for their children. Ignorance is a serious problem factor militating against the women folk in their responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, values are standards of conduct, efficiency or worth that the society endorses, maintains and transmits to the future generation. This study stresses the importance of women acting as agent of change in the pursuit of re-orientating the society in the core value system of the country. This study discussed the Nigerian traditional perspective of the neglect of marriage and family value system and its effect on the society. The behaviours and actions of individuals in any nation such as Nigeria are greatly influenced by their values system. These values have either positive or negative effects on the social, economic, political, and cultural lives of the society.

In order to avert the ugly implications of the debased values system in Nigeria, it is recommended that:

- i. National Orientation Agency should embark on re-orientation campaign and enlightenment on the effect of debased values in the country.
- ii. Quality attention should be given to the upbringing of the child as family morals should be inculcated and this will determine the continuous preservation of the traditional values and practices.
- iii. Role models and mentors from all works of life can play a transformational and inspirational part in the lives of members of the society. They should recognize who they are.



- iv. Investment in women's participation in community relations and community development.
- v. Use of Education as an avenue to promote values of the Nigeria society and the importance of women's participation in communities.
- vi. Support of the media and public awareness for the problems and challenges involved is very much needed.

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